HOOT TOOT & WHISTLE

THE STORY OF THE HOOSAC TUNNEL & WILMINGTON RR

By BERNARD R. CARMAN

A 24-mile cliffhanger that taught the big ones a lesson

21

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IN THIS DAY OF RAILROAD DEFICITS, when such giants as the Boston & Maine and the New York, New Haven & Hartford railroads find it impossible to operate their systems at a profit, it seems improbable that a less ambitious enterprise could make a go of the railroad business. Yet some do, among them the tiny handful of short-line, local railroads surviving in New England. This is the story of one such line, one of the shortest of them all, the Hoosac Tunnel & Wilmington Railroad.

The HT&W, whose formal name is almost as long as its main line, runs 10.93 miles from Hoosac Tunnel, Massachusetts, to Readsboro, Vermont—which is to say, from nowhere to nothing much in particular. Hoosac Tunnel, which guards the eastern portal of the great bore carrying the Fitchburg division of the Boston & Maine through the Berkshire barrier near the border of Massachusetts and Vermont, is a village only by courtesy. Readsboro, at the other end of the line in Bennington County, Vermont, is admittedly a bit more substantial: it has about 800 residents.

Neither of the terminal communities is what you would call thriving these days. Put it down as unlikely that these two settlements could combine forces with Monroe Bridge, Massachusetts (population 210), located along the HT&W, to support a full-fledged, operating railroad engaged in interstate commerce with all the majesty of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe. But facts are facts, and there is the HT&W's diesel chugging up and down the valley several times each week. The little railroad even shows an occasional profit—a modest one, perhaps, but still written in the ledgers in very black ink, which is more than many railroads of greater fame can claim.

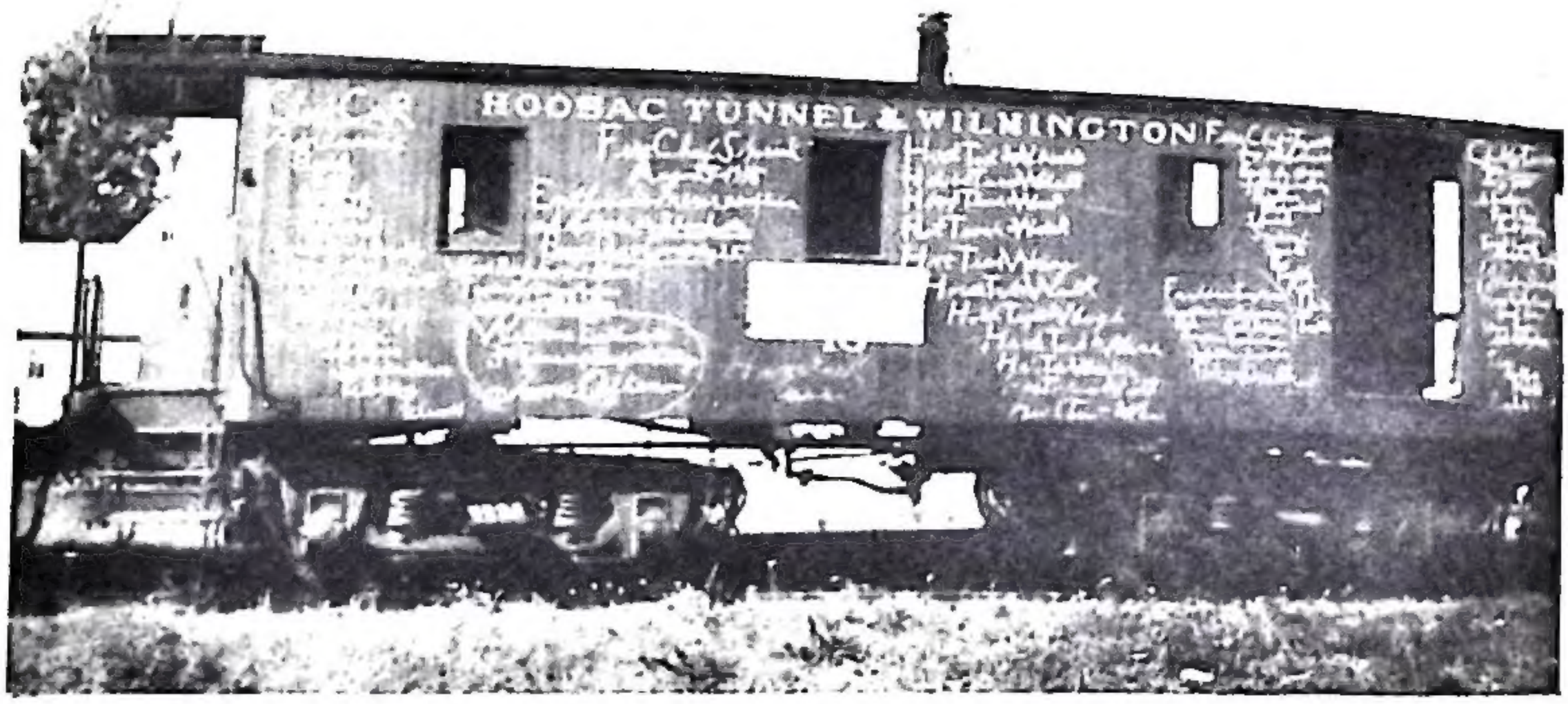
In a larger sense, surely, the eighty-year history of the HT&W has been uneventful. It opened no new lands to settlement, wrought absolutely no changes in the commercial and agricultural structure of the nation, never disturbed the digestions of New York stockbrokers. It only survived. All things considered, that took a good deal of doing.

The railroad had its ups, including what may well be a record for a single dividend on railroad stock, amounting to about $3 for each mile of track. It had its downs, including the loss of more than half its track mileage in a flood, a disaster that made the "Wilmington" part of its name little more than a reminder of the glory that once was, when the road ran all the way to Wilmington, Vermont (another metropolis, population

1,200), and had 24 miles of track. In the eyes of the great world, the Hoosac Tunnel & Wilmington was and is an enterprise of consummate insignificance.

In the eyes of those who knew it best in its palmy days, however, the little railroad was something else. For better or worse, it produced permanent changes in the character of the Vermont villages it served, and it had a major impact on the lives of residents of the Deerfield Valley. They responded with a kind of affection that comes only to what is small and intimate, as the HT&W certainly is. Schoolchildren wrote about it; their parents saluted their railroad in Independence Day orations, wrote odes to it and recited them at village celebrations. But above all, everybody coined nicknames for it. The road's initials stimulated the imaginations of the Vermonters and of the railroad fans who later came to cherish the HT&W as its neighbors did. Some of the nicknames were ridiculous—Halibut Tuna & Whale, Hemp Thread & Warp, Hot Tamale & Water, Horse Trot & Walk, Hard Tack & Wine, Hot Tea & Whiskey. Some were descriptive, either of the railroad or its passengers, or both—Hungry Tired & Weary, Hog Tied & Wobbly, and, in tribute to the roller-coaster roadbed along the cliffs 80 feet above the rocky bed of the Deerfield River gorge, the Hold Tight & Worry.

But the air of gentle, affectionate derision in these familiar names did not really square with the way the people of the Deerfield Valley and the railroad fans felt about their railroad, so all but one of the nicknames fell into disuse, recalled only by those who collect the lore of the HT&W. Most everybody else preferred to call it by the name that made it, in nomenclature, at least, the archetype of all local railroads, all short lines everywhere. They called it the Hoot Toot & Whistle.



THE DEERFIELD RIVER rises high on the slopes of the Green Mountains in southern Vermont and, having gathered its main tributaries from terrain equally dramatic, slices down through the hills for sixty miles to join the mighty Connecticut in the gentler countryside near Greenfield, Massachusetts. A superlative trout stream in its wilderness stretches, the Deerfield is very much of a piece with the New England mountains from which it springs—lovely, and not entirely hospitable to man.

Settlers first came to the northern Deerfield region in the mid-18th century, and from the first the forests and rock-ribbed hills resisted their efforts to farm the slopes of the upper valley. During the hundred years following, the descendants of the immigrants began emigrating themselves, heading for new lands in the West. Then for a time the valley held its own; but by the second decade after the Civil War depopulation of the region reached alarming proportions. With an economy based on marginal agriculture, cut off from markets by the surrounding mountains, the valley was a backwater. "Forty-five years ago," one of its residents wrote, "Wilmington was on the direct route from Brattleboro to Troy, New York, through which a daily stage passed. . . . Now, since the railroads have sidetracked us, if a traveler is seen to pass through this village he is presumed to be on a pleasure excursion or to have lost his reckoning."

Wilmingtonians had good reason to feel sidetracked. Shortly after the war, when completion of the 4¾-mile railroad tunnel through the Hoosac Range seemed impossible, there had been an abortive stir from the southwest for a line down from Wilmington to North Adams, Massachusetts, where it would connect with a route proposed to bypass the tunnel entirely. Failure of the scheme was no cause for bitterness, though, since there remained hope for a line along the old Brattleboro-Troy stage road. Surveyed in 1851, the project was revived in 1870 and 1882—only to collapse despite a $42,000 come-on voted by Wilmington. Said one cynic as an epitaph to the proposal, "There is just as much chance that Noah's Ark will pass through town as there is that a train of cars will ever come within hearing distance of Wilmington."

But railroads followed industry, not vice versa, and the northern purlieus of the Deerfield simply had no industry to offer. It was time to stop looking sideways at Bennington and Brattleboro and start focusing south down the valley, where two things combined to promise a change. First was the opening in 1876 of the Hoosac Tunnel, an engineering masterpiece that took the rails of the Troy & Greenfield—soon to become the Fitchburg line of the Boston & Maine—under the mountain, so providing a major rail junction only 25 miles below Wilmington. The second, and even more significant, development was discovery by the Newton brothers of Holyoke, Massachusetts, of large stands of virgin timber in the hills

along Vermont's section of the river.

The brothers controlled a complex of wood-using enterprises around their home city on the Connecticut and possessed a formidable array of business talents: Daniel H., the eldest, was a contractor, builder, and promoter; James H. was primarily a banker; Moses was an expert in management, and John C., the youngest, was an able engineer and manufacturer. They needed a new pulp plant to supply the Newton Paper Company in Holyoke, and their search for a site led them to Readsboro, Vermont. The town had everything they needed—a handy source of pulp logs, plenty of water for processing and for power, and an available labor force recently idled by the burning of the local tannery.

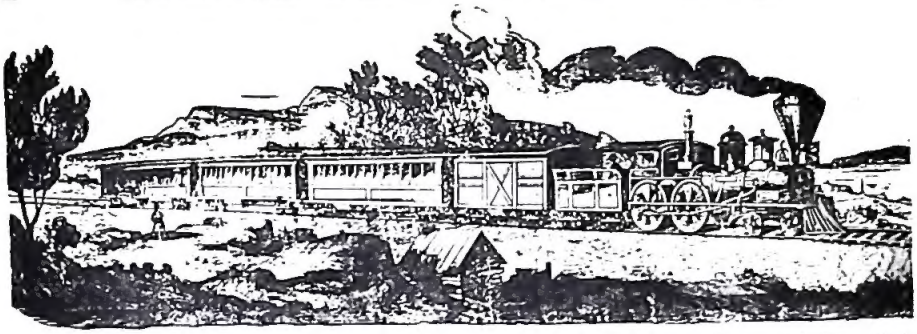
They created the Deerfield River Company as a Vermont subsidiary of their paper firm, and launched an empire of village industries in the valley. The first units, built in Readsboro in 1882, were a saw- and pulp-mill, powered by the river. The mill's dam, 57 feet high and costing $60,000, was reported at the time to be the highest in the country.

The Deerfield River Company originally planned to haul its pulp by oxteam to Hoosac Tunnel, where it would be transferred to the Fitchburg line's tank cars; but this soon proved unsatisfactory. Therefore in 1884 the company obtained a Vermont charter for a railroad of its own and called it the Deerfield River Railroad Company. Its permission from Massachusetts to lay track over the 6-mile stretch between the border hamlet of Shermans, Vermont, and Hoosac Tunnel was not especially memorable. Vermont's franchise covering the 5 miles from Shermans to Readsboro was a different matter: it entitled the company to build "a railroad with single or double track, with standard or narrow gauge, commencing on the southerly boundary line of the State of Vermont, in the townships of Whitingham or Readsboro, and running thence by the most convenient route through any or either of the following . . . viz., Whitingham, Readsboro, Stamford, Wilmington, Searsburg, Dover, Somerset, Glastenbury, Woodford, Stratton, Winhall, Manchester, Sunderland, Arlington, Shaftsbury, and Bennington." Thus—and the fact should be kept in mind—the line was allowed to meander over most of the state's two southern counties, as far as junctions with the Rutland & Bennington on the west and with the West River Railroad on the north.

Construction started immediately, and on July 4, 1885, the spanking new locomotive *Readsboro* hauled its first train over 11 miles of 3-foot, narrow-gauge track running from the village of Hoosac Tunnel, Massachusetts, to Readsboro, Vermont, laid at a cost of $100,000.

The following year, to keep corporate threads untangled, the Newtons reorganized the line as a unit separate from the Deerfield River Company, incorporating it in Massachusetts as the Hoosac Tunnel & Wilmington

RAIL-ROAD



MEETING!

A Meeting to consider the subject of building a Railroad from North Adams, Mass., to Wilmington, Vt., will be held at Stamford, Vt., on

Thursday, June 13, 1867,

AT THE

BAPTIST CHURCH,

At One o'clock P. M.

It is proposed to connect the Wilmington & North Adams road with the newly projected road from North Adams to Williamsburgh Mass., to aid the construction of which, the Legislature of Mass. has appropriated the sum of one million dollars.

All citizens of the Southern and middle portions of the State of Vermont are vitally interested in the development of their portion of the State by Railroad enterprises, and should not fail to attend this meeting and give their aid and encouragement to this great work. It will be the best day's work they can do this year.

Several eminent Speakers are expected to be present and address the meeting.

By request of numerous Citizens of Vermont.

DAVID H. RAYMOND.

TRANSCRIPT PRINT, NORTH ADAMS.

Railroad; the DRRR tracks and equipment in Massachusetts were transferred to the HT&W. At its official birth in 1886, then, the Hoosac Tunnel & Wilmington legally, and on paper, stopped at the state line, some 18 miles short of the Wilmington so grandly rounding out its name.

Yet even before this tangible promise of a railroad headed their way at last, citizens of that town had approached the Newtons about a possible extension. But the price of $96,000, quoted by the brothers in 1885, was prohibitive. Wilmington had to sit back, eyeing the new wealth downriver with increasing envy.

Within four years of the railroad's coming, Readsboro's population had risen from 700 to 900; the tannery had been rebuilt, and two furniture factories had been established, including the Readsboro Chair Company, owned by the Newtons. All told, the town had nearly one hundred men on industrial payrolls, compared with none before the arrival of the Deerfield River Company and its original pulp plant. Monroe Bridge, just over the line in Massachusetts, shared in the boom, for the railroad attracted to that community the James Ramage Paper Company, longest-lived of the valley industries, still in business as the Deerfield Glassine Company.

Consensus throughout the region was that prosperity was the direct result of having a railroad, and that the railroad specifically responsible was the Hoosac Tunnel & Wilmington. Technically, of course, its rails stopped at Shermans—and would do so until an unremarkable corporate switch several years later—but in the popular mind all trackage north of the border was considered the HT&W too. Therefore it was in the name of an extension to the HT&W that Wilmington renewed its efforts to bring the line the rest of the way up the valley.

Chief agitator for the railroad was the town's new weekly newspaper, the *Deerfield Valley Times*. Head campaigner was a local lawyer, Hosea Mann Jr., whose efforts led to the appointment of a group to wait on the Newtons. If the brothers regarded potential business as a prerequisite for bringing in tracks at a reasonable cost, perhaps a list of ventures established in the past few years would be an inducement. Since its first formal request in 1885, when apparently the town was able to offer next to nothing, it now had: a thriving co-operative creamery; a fairly large-scale maker of bench screws; a posh tourist resort due to open its doors as the Lake Raponda Hotel in the summer of '89; plus the Wilmington Grain & Lumber Company, ready to manufacture chair stock in impressive quantity—an item having little news value, since it had been organized by Moses Newton. In addition, the neighbor villages of Jacksonville and Whitingham had a woodware plant and a shoe factory, respectively. The committee reported back that the industrialists would now be

willing to extend their railroad to Wilmington for a mere $60,000 in cash, $35,000 of it from Wilmington, the rest from Whitingham, halfway between Readsboro and Wilmington.

Sentiment for the railroad was strong in Wilmington, but Whitingham was something less than enthusiastic. The proposed route up the river would miss the village of Whitingham by a good mile, and it would be even farther west of the center of the township's population in the incorporated village of Jacksonville. The Newtons offered a compromise involving a gift of land instead of cash, but at a special town meeting in May 1889 Whitingham voted not to aid the railroad. Early in 1891, however, the promoters received a lucky break when the Deerfield Shoe Company, Whitingham's major industry, succumbed to the financial hanky-panky of its superintendent. The Newtons promptly bought into the bankrupt company, and the more perceptive students of economics began to see new virtues in the railroad.

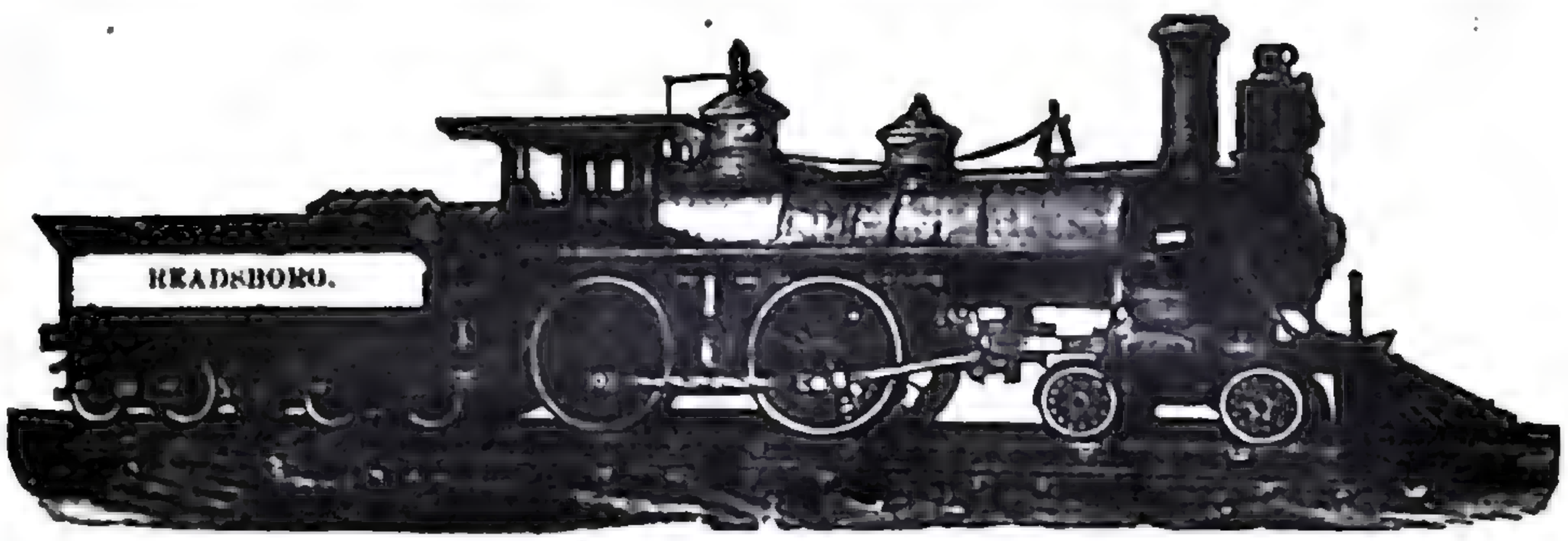
The hour was at hand. Wilmington led off with a town meeting on February 21, voting to bond for $32,000 and pledging another $8,000 by private subscription to build the railroad. A week later Whitingham, its share now reduced to $10,000, approved an allocation of $3,000 cash, got credit for another $3,000 by surrendering the old River Road along the east bank of the Deerfield as a right-of-way, and pledged $4,000 in private funds.

Raising the money proved to be relatively simple. Both Wilmington and Whitingham fell far short of their private pledges, the former contributing only $3,200 and the latter a mere $700. But Dover came in for $500, Searsburg posted $150, and fugitives from the valley in New York and Brooklyn came up with $2,100. A number of firms in the region also contributed, with two of the larger gifts being $1,500 from the screw plant, the R. Bliss Manufacturing Company, and $1,000 from Wilmington Grain & Lumber, as well as a gift of $3,400 from the businessmen of North Adams, Massachusetts, the metropolis soon to be less than two hours away. D. H. Newton hustled off to Boston to buy rails and then to New York to contract for labor. Professor J. V. Hazen rushed down from Dartmouth to survey the new route.

The start of construction on June 1, 1891, introduced a taste of the cosmopolitan delights of the outside world. The four hundred Italian immigrants imported from New York City to provide heavy labor were almost the first foreigners many of the valley residents had ever seen. What with the Italians' colorful deportment and their stores of beer and wine in a state that had been dry for fifty years, visits to their camps became popular diversions, the next best thing to a Sunday afternoon at the zoo.

Such goings-on did not hamper the work at hand. By September 4 the rails were only two miles from Wilmington, but a combination of cutting and filling made those two miles the most difficult on the entire 24-mile route to build, and it was almost two months before the tracks reached Wilmington.

In its completed form the Hoosac Tunnel & Wilmington Railroad (as the whole line was officially, but quietly, designated in January 1892) demonstrated quite conclusively that a lot of what was taught in engineering schools about railroad construction could be ignored, at least on occasion. Consider the grades. At Hoosac Tunnel the HT&W's tracks branched off the main line of the Fitchburg at an elevation of 770 feet above sea level; 24 miles away they entered Wilmington at an elevation of 1,560 feet above sea level. Now that represents an average rise of about



THE NEW RAILROAD OPENED

THE DEERFIELD VALLEY RAILROAD OPENED FOR BUSINESS.

WILMINGTON CONNECTED WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD BY AN IRON BAND

Two Grand Excursions—Speeches by the the Messrs. Newton and Others—A Gala Day for Wilmington.

Wednesday and Thursday were red letter days in Wilmington's history. That long-looked-for time has arrived when we can step onto the cars at our village and go by rail to any place of importance in the country.

Just how many times the railroad question has been agitated in Wilmington during the past fifty years we do not know, but it has been many times and many hundred dollars besides months of time have been

"THE DEERFIELD VALLEY TIMES" REPORTS THE RR GETS TO WILMINGTON

33 feet to the mile, or roughly 1 foot vertically for every 160 feet horizontally. One contemporary expert on railroad engineering figured that "an incline of 1 in 400 is reckoned easy, of 1 in 200 moderate, and of 1 in 100 heavy." Thus the *average* grade of the HT&W over its entire length fell somewhere between "moderate" and "heavy."

But all is not that simple. In one stretch of about 1.2 miles, from the gorge just below Monroe Bridge to the flats just above, the railroad climbed 100 feet—about 1 foot vertically for every 63 feet horizontally, a very heavy grade by the standards of that day, or of this one. In addition, from its southern terminus to the Vermont line the HT&W is literally a cliffhanger, clinging to the narrow shelf carved from the mountainside to accommodate it, never less than 40 feet above the rocky riverbed, sometimes twice as high.

Truth to tell, however, the people of Wilmington and environs were not really terribly interested in analyzing the spectacular terrain of their native heath. They were more interested in the idea of inaugurating service with a gala excursion to North Adams, 29 miles away via the HT&W and the Fitchburg.

November 4, 1891, was picked for the day, departure time 8 a.m. People began lining up in the chill hours before dawn, and by the appointed hour some four hundred were waiting to board the eight cars provided for the trip. The engine was No. 5, the powerful *Sherman,* most muscular of the railroad's locomotives, with Archie Kingsley at the throttle, George Gould the fireman, and Murray Hicks the conductor. The Wilmington Cornet Band, boarding the train at the last minute, played the special out of town. Making six stops along the line, the train arrived at the end of the HT&W at Hoosac Tunnel with seven hundred aboard. A special standard-gauge train awaited the visitors at the junction, with North Adams businessmen and civic leaders aboard. After a trip through the famous tunnel, the group reached North Adams shortly before noon. The North Adams Band joined their Wilmington colleagues at the depot, playing stirring airs as the visitors marched to the Odd Fellows Hall for lunch. After an afternoon on the town, the group embarked again, reaching Wilmington about 8 that evening.

The following day the flow of traffic ran in the other direction. Three special trains brought nearly six hundred people to Wilmington for a celebration, among them eight Newtons from Holyoke to view the family fief. About one fourth of the visitors crowded into the Vermont House for a speaking program of considerable length. The shortest speech was delivered by James H. Flagg of North Adams, who pleaded a headache as his excuse; and one of the longest came from D. H. Newton, president of the railroad, who expatiated on the benefits the valley could expect

from the $400,000 investment which the railroad represented.

With the inauguration over, the HT&W settled down to the more humdrum business of running two regular trains down the valley and back each day, the one-way trips requiring about an hour. And if new money did not come flooding immediately into the area, for the moment the people along the right-of-way were content with their simple faith that prosperity was sure to follow the railroad.

All was not entirely roses among the home folks, even so. A group of Whitingham dissidents, leary of the bother and cost of getting goods to and from the still remote stations serving Jacksonville and Whitingham, announced that they were planning a large canal to connect their Lake Sadawga with the Deerfield on one side and the Connecticut on the other. Such a facility, they confidently predicted, would "without doubt, make this the chief seaport town of southern Vermont." Chief and only, they might have added; but they contented themselves with the observation that the competition would serve to hold rail freight rates down. With that parting salvo, the canal scheme vanished forever, although three decades later the idea of a port in southern Vermont would be revived.

However, carping like this was soon drowned by rejoicing over the Newtons' latest project. Fully two years before the line reached Wilmington, the brothers realized that easily accessible timber around Readsboro was nearly exhausted, and it was time to move on. They sold their chair factory to local men, retaining a share, and they transferred the original mill of the Deerfield River Company to the National Metal Edge Box Company of Philadelphia, in which, to be sure, they held a major interest. Ready for their greatest operation, they moved to the top of the valley and, in 1893, dammed the Deerfield at its junction with its North Branch about a mile west of Wilmington. The dam, 26 feet high, a quarter-mile long, and costing $20,000, created a 75-acre pond. Beside the dam the Deerfield River Company built Mountain Mills, henceforth the focus of the Newton enterprises in the valley, and for thirty years its largest industry.

By 1900 the box score of industrial development in and around Wilmington included, in addition to greatly expanded supply and tourist services: reopening of the shoe factory in Whitingham; expansion of Jacksonville's North River Manufacturing Company, since 1895 a Newton property; Wilmington Grain & Lumber Company, turning out hardwood chair stock at peak capacity; and Mountain Mills, in its dual plant employing one hundred men to process pulpwood from the mountain townships west and north of Wilmington as fast as it could get it, as well as to saw out 7,000,000 board feet of lumber annually.

Naturally such activity brought substantial business to the railroad.

NARROW-GAUGE (3-FOOT) STEAM LOCOMOTIVES OF THE HOOSAC TUNNEL & WILMINGTON RAILROAD, IN ORDER OF ACQUISITION:

No. 1. *Readsboro:* 0-4-4 built by Baldwin in 1884; eventually scrapped.

No. 2. *Whitingham:* 0-4-4 built by Baldwin in 1886; later rebuilt as No. 7.

No. 3. *Jacksonville:* 0-4-4 built by Mason; eventually scrapped.

No. 4. *Monroe Bridge:* 4-4-0 built by Baldwin in 1877; sold to Cuban plantation in 1916.

No. 5. *Sherman:* 4-4-0 built by Baldwin; later rebuilt with No. 6 and redesignated No. 8.

No. 6. *Heartwellville:* 4-4-0 built by Baldwin; later rebuilt with No. 5 and redesignated No. 8.

No. 7. *Newton:* 4-4-0 built by Baldwin in 1886; finally scrapped in 1920.

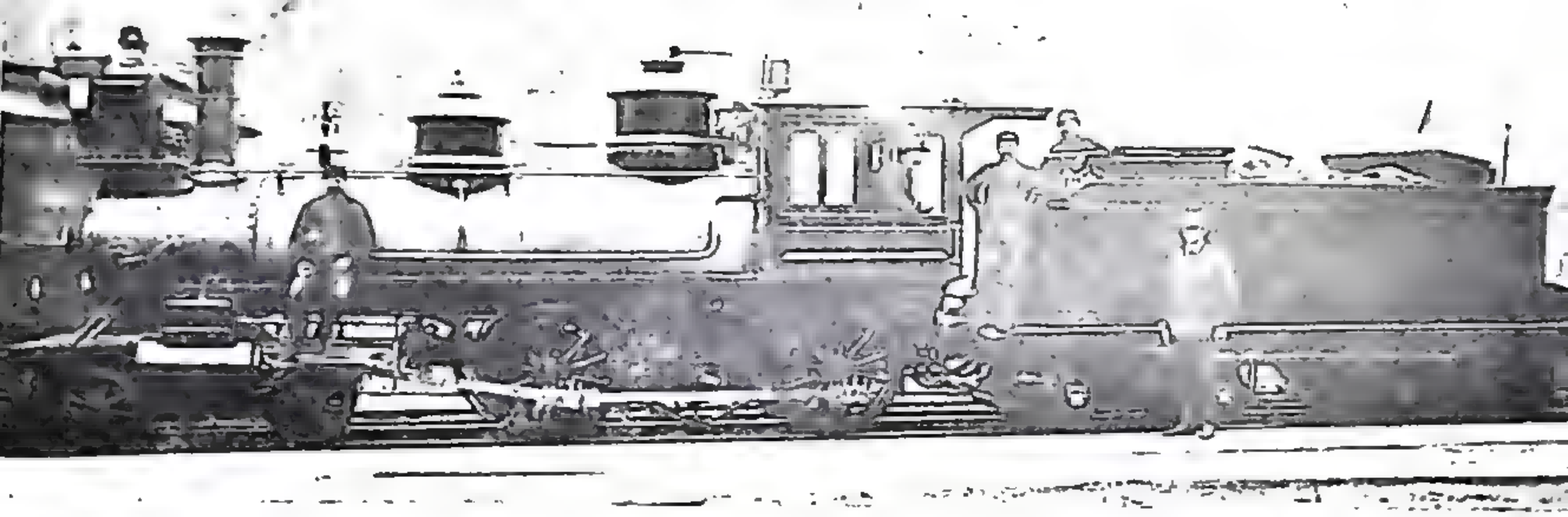
No. 8. *Readsboro (II):* 4-4-0 built by Baldwin in 1895 from No. 5 and No. 6; scrapped in 1915.

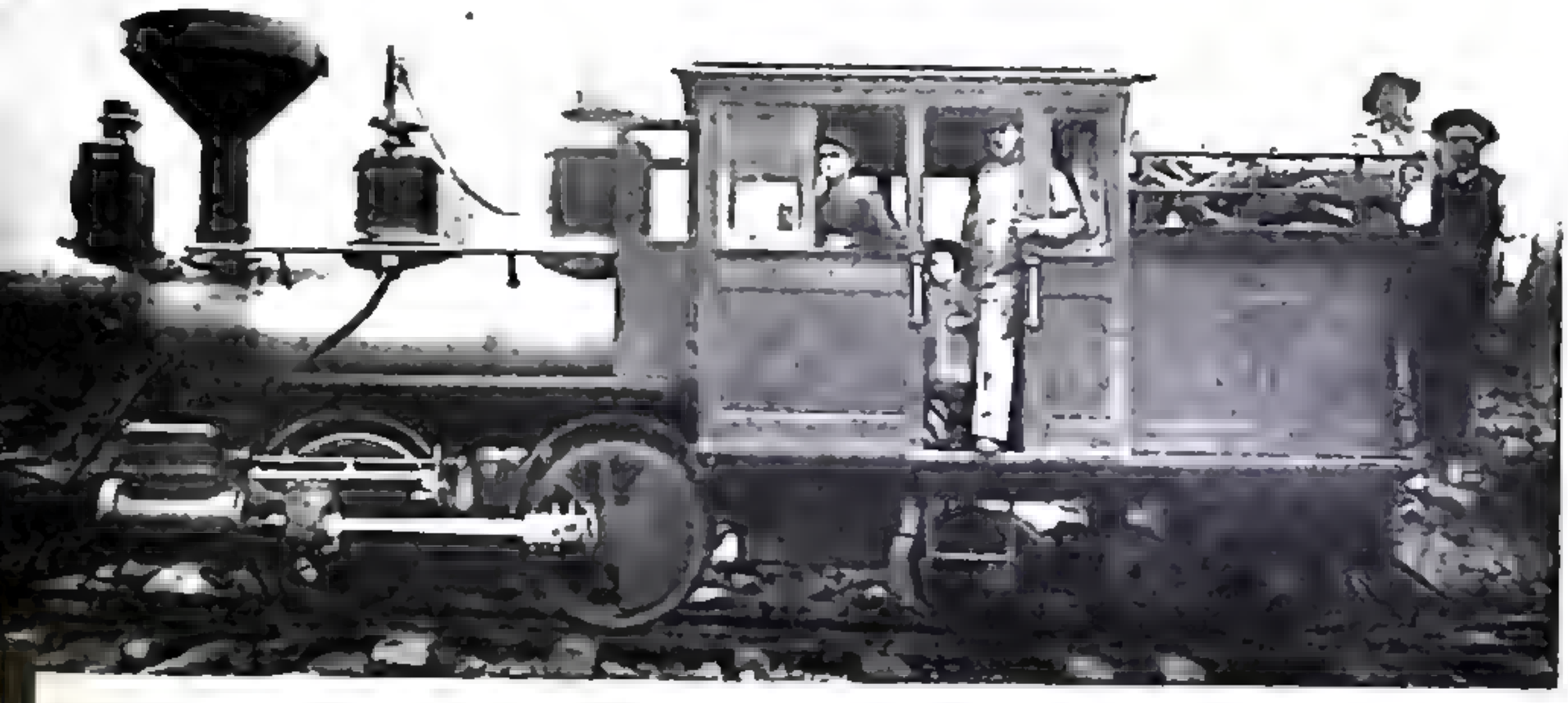
No. 9. *Mountain Mills:* 2-8-0 built by Grant in 1890; sold to Cuba in 1916.

No. 10. *Wilmington:* 2-8-0 built by Grant in 1892; later redesignated No. 12; sold to Cuba in 1916 with No. 4 and No. 9.

The year before the line was finished, the HT&W had seven employees; in 1892, the year after its headquarters moved north to Wilmington, it had twenty-six; and by 1895 it had fifty-six. It had five locomotives in operation, eight passenger cars, and 106 freight cars of its own. In the year 1895 the railroad carried 34,658 passengers and 49,429 tons of freight, earning a grand total of $89,606. The breakdown of freight shows clearly whence the business came: of the total freight tonnage, 16,340 were forest products and paper pulp, 5,179 were lumber.

All in all, most residents of the valley felt that the little railroad was by all odds the best thing that had ever happened to the region. For the new spirit of progress, the souvenir book of Wilmington's 1900 Old Home Week Reunion gave complete credit to "the courage, foresight and enterprise of the Newton Bros., who have tried their faith and sunk their capital in the great improvements in this valley." While praising the energy and acumen of a local Vermont protégé named Martin Brown—at the age of





SOME NARROW
GAUGE ENGINE
OF THE HT&W
BEFORE CONVER
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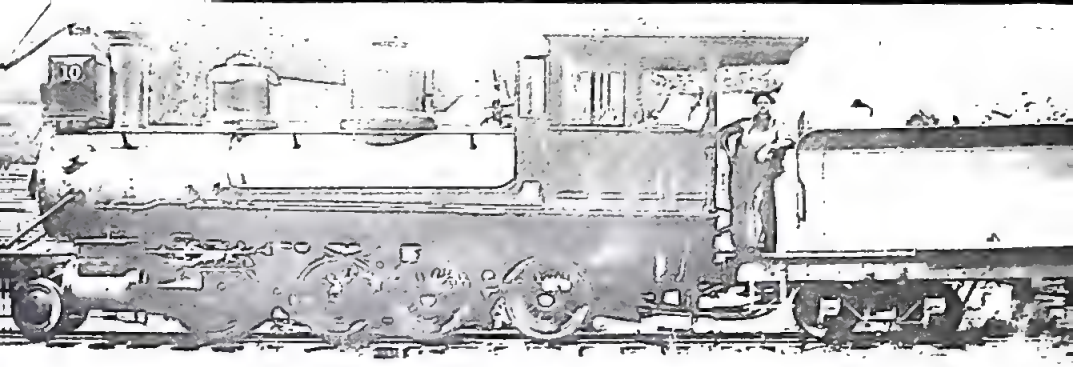
1913



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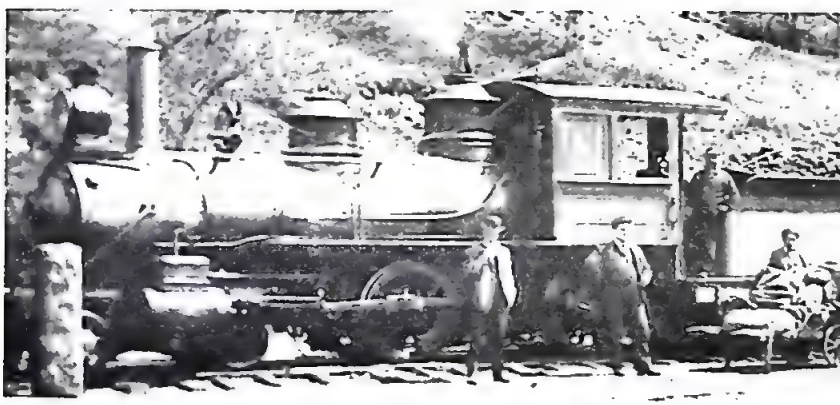
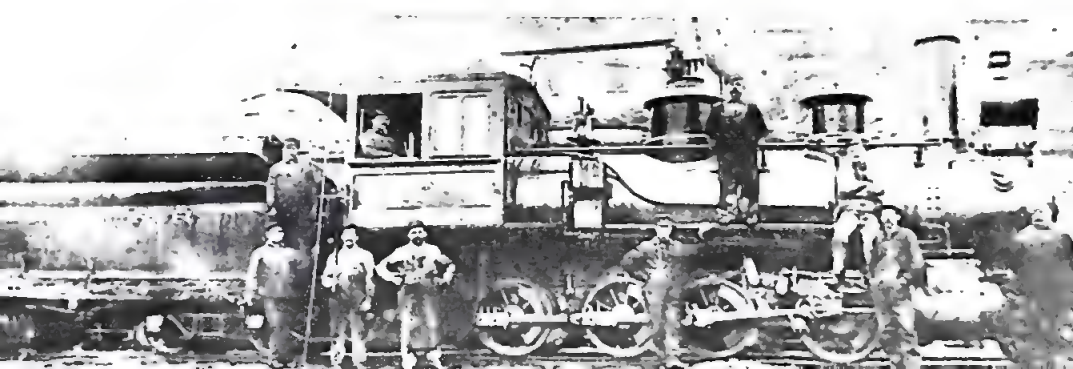




MOUNTAIN MILLS TRESTLE UNDER CONSTRUCTION

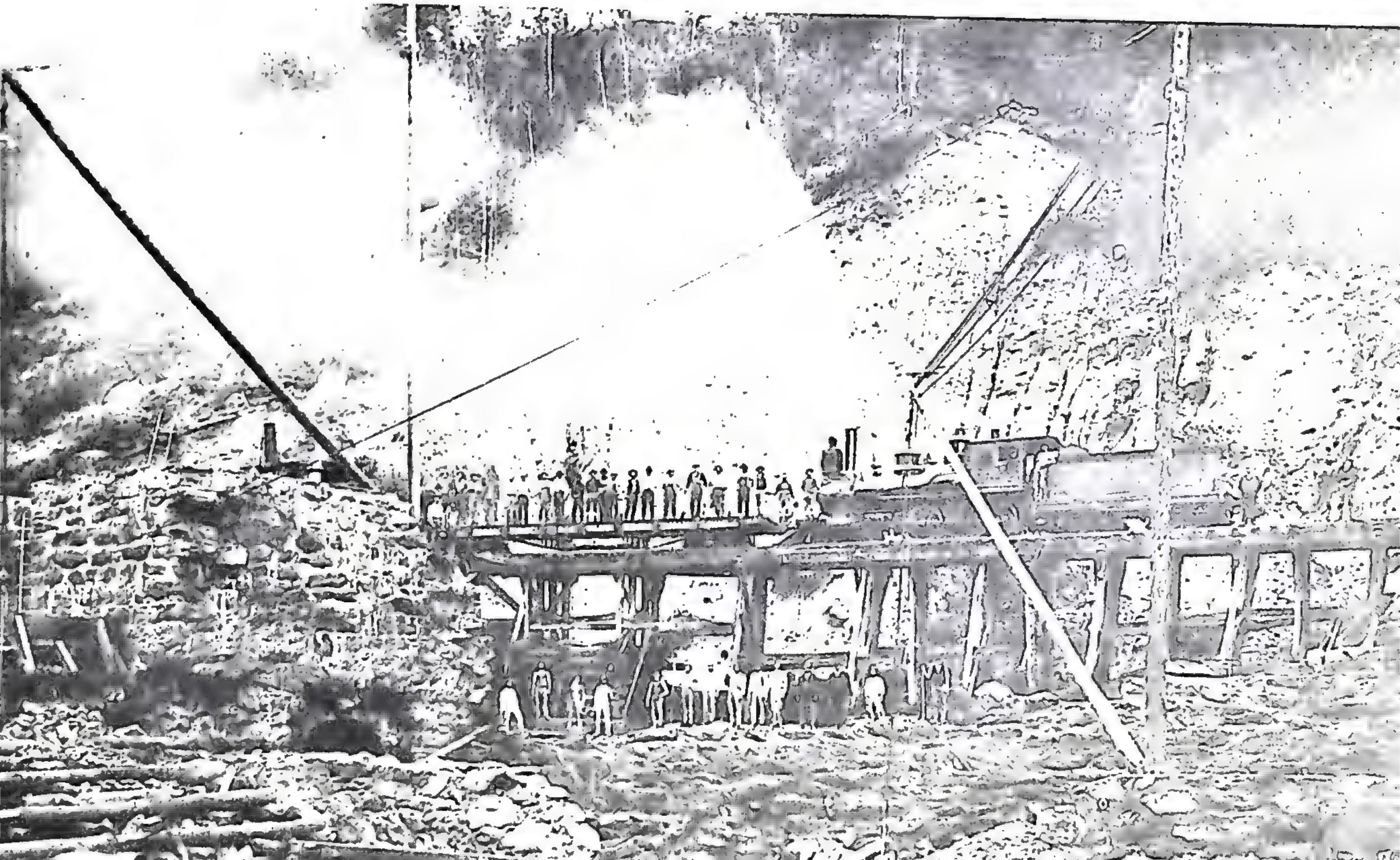
twenty-five he was general passenger agent of the HT&W and treasurer of both the Deerfield River and the Wilmington Grain & Lumber companies—it cited Moses and the recently deceased John as being the chief executives in the new prosperity. The Newtons were the patriarchs of the region.

Thus it came as something of a shock when, in July 1904, the Newtons sold the majority of their holdings in the valley to a New York syndicate headed by J. P. Kellas of Malone, New York. Included in the sale, along with the railroad and industrial properties, were 123,000 acres of timberland in Windham and Bennington counties. The price was $1,500,000.

Once again the Newtons showed that they knew when to pull out and

NO. 4 RUNS INTO TROUBLE NORTH OF READSBORO

MOUNTAIN MILLS WASHOUT (C. 1901) TOOK OUT PULPMILL FORMERLY IN FOREGROUND

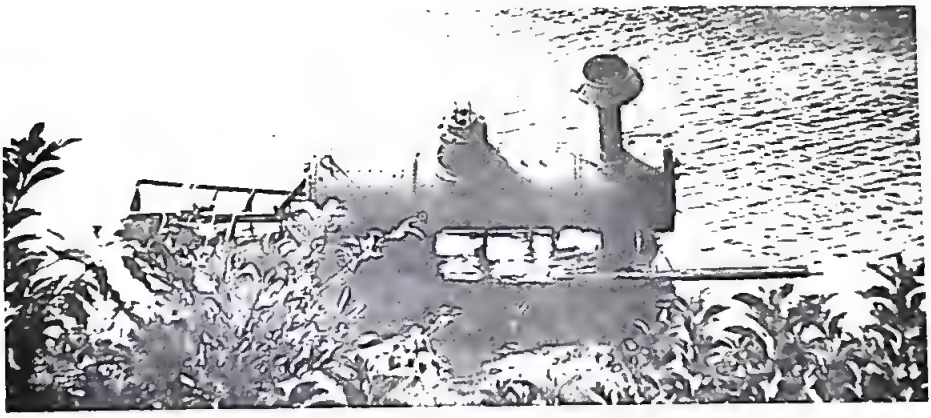


move on, for obviously the timber near the river couldn't last long. It was left to the new owners to probe deeper into the hills. Out came the old charter of the Deerfield River Railroad, which had blanket permission to go almost anywhere this side of the Union Pacific. Between 1908 and the start of World War I they ran as much as 30 miles of narrow-gauge track into the surrounding hills. Much of this mileage was temporary, laid to serve roving log operations and moved on to fresh timber stands as the old ones were exhausted. Remaining in place from 1911 to 1913 was the section carrying labor and materials for construction of the New England Power Company's dam high on the East Branch of the Deerfield in Somerset. With Power Station No. 5, built near Monroe Bridge shortly before, Somerset Reservoir marked the beginning of the hydroelectric development of the Deerfield River.

Meanwhile, and inevitably, there were many rumors about what the new owners planned to do with their holdings. It was said that they intended to create a vast hunting preserve and club for the very rich; that they would build a new pulpmill in the wilds of Glastenbury; that they would connect the HT&W with other railroads to the west and east. Of the many guesses, only one proved accurate: in July 1912 the Kellas group announced that the HT&W would be converted from the narrow, 3-foot, gauge to the standard gauge of 4 feet, 8½ inches. Three months later they proved they meant business by dispatching Engineer Win Crozier to Atlanta to pick up Engine No. 14, a twenty-nine-year-old, standard-gauge veteran of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Work on the changeover started as soon as frost was out of the ground next spring, and by August 2, 1913, the HT&W was standard gauge from Hoosac Tunnel to Wilmington. The only narrow track left in the Deerfield Valley was on the logging roads feeding timber to Mountain Mills. Of the surviving narrow-gauge equipment, two locomotives remained

STEAMSHOVEL ESCORT HAS ENGINE NO. 2 (LEFT) AND NO. 4



ABANDONED RELIC OF OLD NO. 1 FASCINATED RR BUFFS

with the logging operations, and three others—the *Monroe Bridge*, the *Mountain Mills*, and the *Wilmington*—made their way in 1916 to the San Ramon Sugar Plantation in Cuba. Much-battered No. 1, the first *Readsboro*, the only brand-new locomotive the HT&W ever owned, twice wrecked so thoroughly that it had to be rebuilt at the factory, damaged by several other mishaps, survived to become a tourist attraction of sorts. After the old engine's running gear succumbed to the ravages of time and accident, the boiler was mounted on trucks and hauled around the railroad to serve as a mobile power source. The rising waters of Sherman Reservoir overtook it on the siding at Sherman Station, and there it stayed for several years, its distinctive diamond stack attracting the notice of all railroad fans who traveled the HT&W, until hauled out and sold for scrap in the late 1930s.

The changeover to standard gauge was, among other things, a concrete recognition of the fact that the HT&W, whatever its shortcomings, had proved itself. In 1905 the railroad's operating revenues passed the $100,000 mark, remaining at that level for the next nineteen years. In addition to its mixed trains, the railroad now ran two all-passenger trains each day, on a schedule that included station stops in transit at Mountain Mills, Jacksonville, Whitingham, Readsboro, and Monroe Bridge, and flag stops at Shermans, Heywoods, and Logans. Its freight business also mounted steadily, with the coming of a new kind of industrial activity to the valley.

The railroad had contributed mightily to the survival of the region by making it possible to reach the timber stands and to ship the products made from them. In this phase of industrialization, the power generated by the Deerfield had been only an instrument. In the next it became the focus of the valley's industry, with the Deerfield River its principal resource, pure power its major product.

THE HT&W and the relative prosperity it brought also affected the lives of valley residents in ways other than economic. Perhaps the most dramatic result was the sudden ending of the isolation that had characterized the region since its settlement more than a century before. The railroad offered a wide variety of special excursions to various kinds of cultural events–to performances of *Uncle Hiram* or *The Merry Milkmaids* in Readsboro, to cosmopolitan North Adams for circuses and musical recitals—as well as package tours to Boston, New York, and points beyond.

An excursion to Boston might draw 100 to 200 passengers. Trips to Saratoga, New York, the very seat of sophistication in the '90s, attracted upwards of 500, virtually depopulating the valley. As soon as the trains crossed into wet Massachusetts, some of the excursionists began celebrating. The travel writer of the *Deerfield Valley Times* described the process with heavy irony. "The trip from Hoosac Tunnel to Saratoga, 71 miles, was uneventful and made with few stops, once or twice to remedy some slight defect in the engine. During these stops numerous excursionists were observed running towards nearby hotels and groceries, presumably to get the toothpicks which they were chewing when they returned. . . . The return trip was uneventful, save for a few slight disturbances by a few who were overjoyed, but we think on the whole the party were remarkably quiet, sober, and peaceable, considering that there were about 500 people of all classes and ages, a few of whom went especially to have a good time."

Another early traveler was a reporter from the *Boston Globe*, dispatched to report on the folkways of the aborigines in wildest Vermont. He marveled at the roadbed–"one mile of the 24 is straight"–and at the equipment, especially the "odd little passenger car that has the usual plush seats on one side and single wooden chairs formed by cutting a short settee in two on the other side of the car."

The engine, he conceded, "looks as neat and tidy as a New England school marm, but there is trouble about her steam-making qualities and every little while the train stops until she gathers new strength."

This sort of thing was annoying, to be sure, but there were other troubles. The columns of the *Times* regularly carried such notes as: "The last train Tuesday evening was delayed about two hours by the forward trucks of a freight car getting off the track"; or: "The Saturday evening train both ways was late on account of the breaking of parts of the engine." Occasionally the newspaper was moved to sarcasm: "The HT&WRR is progressive, we admit, but when it comes to trying to run an engine through a cow pasture without a track we cry 'Brakes!' "

Sometimes hard luck ran in curious patterns. The railroading Kingsley brothers, for example, were dogged by misfortune; so was Engine No. 10,

NARROW-GAUGE FREIGHT PASSES LOGGING DAM NORTH OF READSBORO

the *Wilmington*, a handsome straight-stack 2-8-0 built by Grant in 1892, and from the time of its acquisition in 1893 the line's premier locomotive. Eventually the Kingsleys and the ill-starred locomotive came together with tragic results.

Three Kingsley boys worked for the railroad. Archie, the eldest, joined the railroad in 1887, when he was only nineteen years old. Percy, the middle brother, came aboard in 1891 as a sixteen-year-old engineer, reputedly the youngest in the East. Some time later the youngest brother, Orrin, signed on as a fireman. Like their careers, the family's troubles started early. In June 1891, Archie Kingsley was at the throttle of the *Whitingham* when a trestle collapsed and dropped it into a pond. A few days later, Percy and Archie, piloting the *Readsboro* and the *Whitingham*, respectively, collided on a curve a short distance below Monroe Bridge. Percy was northbound up the grade with a string of cars, Archie southbound with only the engine and tender. The little *Readsboro* took

TURN-OF-CENTURY VIEW OF READSBORO FEATURES HT&W YARD

the licking in the encounter. Her fireman, Ed Cook, was badly injured, and the locomotive was considerably damaged. The *Whitingham* made it back to Readsboro shops under her own steam and a couple of days later was back on the job. The *Readsboro* required the more expert services of her builders, the Baldwin locomotive works in Philadelphia, to get her back in shape.

Less than a year later, Percy Kingsley and the *Readsboro* caught it again. Spring was always a perilous time of year along the HT&W, and the engineers had to watch the track for rails displaced by frost heaves, the roadbed for soft spots left by the thaw, and the cliffs overhead for rocks and trees broken loose by the winter's ice and released by the warmer weather. Percy was about two and a half miles north of Hoosac Tunnel with a mixed passenger-and-freight train in May 1892 when he glanced up to see a twenty-ton boulder thundering down the mountain toward the track. The rock slammed into the *Readsboro,* bruising Percy and his fireman, a man named Jolivette, derailing the engine, and hurling several passengers from their seats.

Since Percy was only seventeen years old at the time, it is conceivable that his problems could have been the result of inexperience. But for all his youth, Percy learned quickly. Only a week after his first encounter with a chunk of the mountain, Percy rounded a curve to find a landslide, dislodged by the spring thaws, blocking the track. Once again he reversed, once again he was too late; the vibration of the train's passage had shaken loose one last installment of the avalanche, which smashed the tender behind the locomotive. No one was injured, but Percy had had enough. Within the week he resigned and took his talents to the safer precincts of the Boston & Maine, where he survived to retirement.

TIME OUT FOR A PICTURE DURING AN EARLY TRACK CONVERSION

BOILER OF THE KILLER, NO. 10

Meanwhile it appeared that other jinxes were at work. The *Wilmington*, No. 10, destined to become the number-one killer on the HT&W, claimed her first victims in 1898, when the boiler let go with a thunderous explosion near a watering point three miles south of Wilmington. The crewmen, Zeph Douglas and Ernest Faulkner, were blown to bits, the cab and firebox of the locomotive were hurled far into the woods, and the barrel was dropped into the river. By some strange circumstance, however, the frame and running gear of the locomotive were virtually untouched, merely lifted from the rails and deposited beside the track, and it was no trick to rebuild the engine as good as new.

Boiler explosions happened, of course, and railroad men had accidents. But what set the seal on the jinx theory was the final, fatal encounter of the *Wilmington* and the Kingsleys. About 9:45 on the morning of January 11, 1901, Archie, with Orrin aboard as his fireman, came into Hoosac Tunnel station with a string of freight cars behind the *Wilmington*, and a combination car on the rear. A complicated maneuver at this point involved unhitching the combination car and allowing it to drift slowly into the station on the downgrade, while the engine went ahead with the freight cars, backed them into a siding, and then hustled back on the main track in time to pick up the drifting combination car and pull it into the station.

Archie, known as a somewhat impetuous driver, attempted this day to execute the maneuver in jig time. He had released the combination car somewhere back but pulled around the curve at too high a speed. The

Wilmington jumped the track on the downhill curve, toppling him to the left. Orrin, stationed on the right side, made a desperation leap up the slanting floor and out the right-hand door of the cab. He cleared the falling locomotive, but not the tracks. The freight cars, released when the engine coupling snapped, hurtled over him, and the second car in line dragged him for several yards, injuring him so badly that he died before medical help could be summoned. Archie, leaning from the cab on the left, was killed instantly when the locomotive fell on him.

The death of the two Kingsleys brought to four the number of men killed by No. 10, and crewmen on the HT&W began to avoid the locomotive whenever possible. Talking among themselves, they recalled other, minor accidents involving No. 10, trivial mishaps which began to assume new importance as they reviewed the *Wilmington's* record. J. P. Kellas, who bought the line in 1904, was annoyed by the talk and especially irked by the poor repair and service record of No. 10. Eventually he asked Engineer Philip E. Barre for advice.

NO ONE WAS HURT IN THIS 1907 WRECK NEAR MOUNTAIN MILLS

"I told him, 'That engine's a hoodoo,'" Barre recalls today. "'No one wants to work it because they think it's bad luck.'

"He said, 'Well, what shall I do about it?'

"'Give it a new number,' I said. 'If they don't see that No. 10 they won't even think about it. But don't give it 13—that's worse. Make it No. 12.'

"I was about half joking, really," Barre says now, "but he went right ahead and did it. He told the paint crew to put No. 12 on it just as soon as they got the chance. So it became No. 12 from then on, and there weren't any more accidents with it."

If the legend of the hard-luck locomotive was half superstition and

half jest, at least there could be no doubt about the perils of operation in the vicinity of the Hoosac Tunnel. The area was tailor-made for trouble. In addition to the normal perils of a switching yard, the HT&W's terminus offered the added thrills of a sweeping S-curve just above the Y, with one turn a very sharp 18-degree curve, and steep banks a few scant feet from the edge of the roadbed. The wonder was not that the railroad had accidents there, but that the wrecks were so few in number.

The Kingsleys were killed in a switching accident. So too was the next victim, Fireman Ira L. Chase, who fell from a step and was crushed by a slowly moving car in the tunnel yards in June 1908. He died two hours after he reached the hospital in North Adams.

Quick action on the part of an engineer minimized the damage in what could have been a very serious accident on the hazardous track near the tunnel. It happened in 1914, only a year after the changeover to standard gauge, a year in which the section crews had been kept busy trying to spike down rails wandering all over the new, unsettled roadbed. The two-coach train was a special foliage excursion from Boston, bound for Hoosac Tunnel, where a Boston & Maine train was waiting. Phil Barre, the engineer, coasted down the S-curve toward the depot, letting the steam brake the locomotive. As the train slid around the curve at the top of a precipitous 40-foot bank, the rails suddenly spread beneath the coaches. Barre, hearing the screech and rumble of the derailment, instantly hit the air brakes on the locomotive. The train rolled on for perhaps two car lengths, then, in slow motion, the cars toppled over the bank and settled on their sides. Just as slowly and majestically, the engine reared back until the drivers were off the track. Then the train reached a precarious equilibrium, only the engine coupling preventing the cars from tumbling into the river with their one hundred panic-stricken passengers. B&M crewmen, who had seen the entire accident, galloped up the tracks with axes and chopped emergency exits in the upper sides of the cars. Only ten persons suffered minor scratches and bruises.

In fact, no passenger ever lost his life on the HT&W. There had been only one other close call—a derailment near Mountain Mills in 1909. A partly open switch was the villain, and both engine and cars jumped the track. The cars remained upright, but the engine went on its side in the loose gravel of the roadbed, its drivers still churning and digging it half out of sight in the ground. Fireman George Barre, Phil's younger brother, bailed out the top side of the cab. Engineer Win Crozier, fearing a boiler explosion, disembarked by the nearest exit. That happened to be the door on the right side of the cab, which was rapidly disappearing into the ground. Digging and squirming, he wriggled out before the engine went underground completely. When the excitement died down

it was discovered the engine was virtually undamaged, needing only minor repairs. There were no other casualties.

Crewmen on the HT&W were accustomed to rising to the occasion, even when the occasion was somewhat more serious. During the great blizzard of 1888, Engineer Forrest Ball had spent a solid week with his locomotive, unable to move it or drain the boiler, unwilling to let the fires go out and risk a freeze-up which would wreck the boiler. He fed the banked fires until thaws, a plow, and shovelers could extricate his engine.

Some twenty years later a young brakeman, Harrison Kingsley, Archie's son, demonstrated that vigorous railroading remained in the family tradition. His hour of glory arrived while the New England Power Company was building its Station No. 5 on the Deerfield below Monroe Bridge. The power plant stands on the west side of the river; the railroad clings to the cliffs on the east side, its level about 80 feet above that of the power plant. Heavy construction materials and generating equipment arrived at Hoosac Tunnel on the standard-gauge cars of the B&M. At the tunnel the cars were jacked up, the standard-gauge trucks removed and the HT&W's 3-foot trucks installed for the trip to the construction site—a process which, of course, necessitated the disconnecting of the brakes on the cars. From the track on the east side of the river a siding angled down to the river and curved across a temporary trestle to the plant. Because

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STANDARD-GAUGE STEAM LOCOMOTIVES OF THE HOOSAC TUNNEL & WILMINGTON RAILROAD, IN ORDER OF ACQUISITION:

No. 14. (ex-Pa. RR): 4-4-0 built by Pa. RR in 1883; eventually scrapped.

No. 15. (ex-Western NY&Pa. RR): 2-8-0 built by Baldwin in 1890; eventually scrapped.

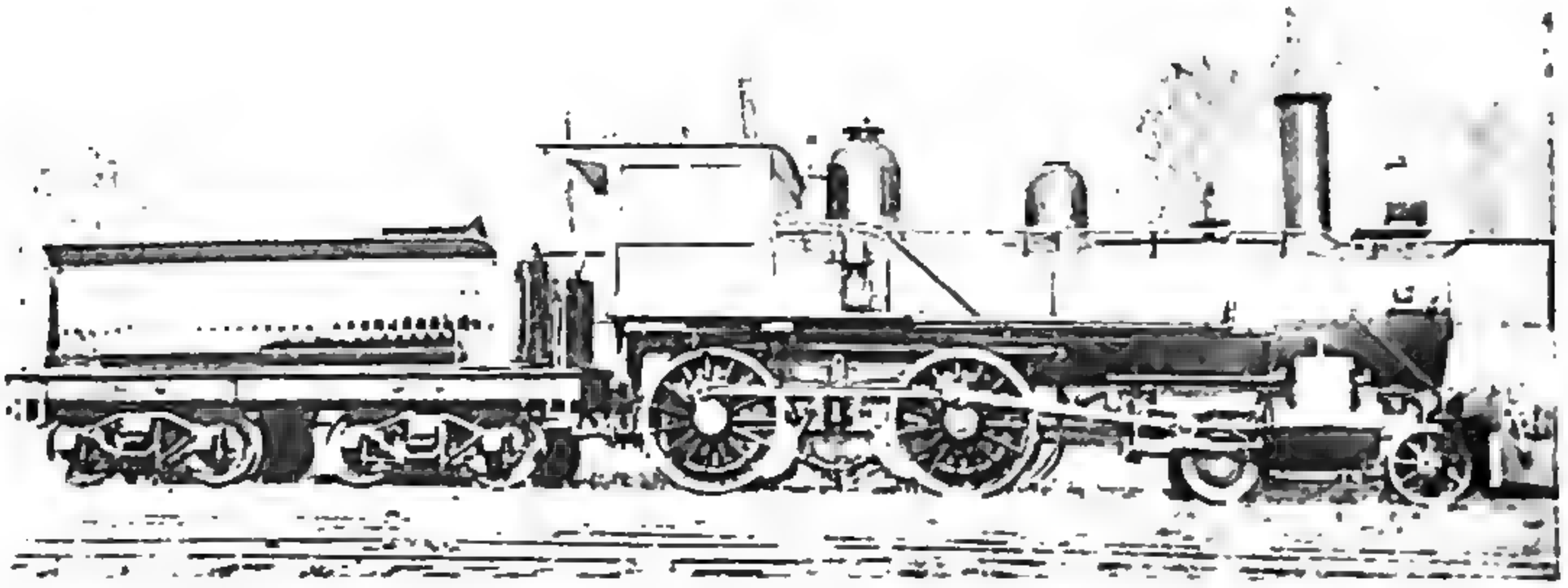
No. 20. (ex-Lake Shore & Michigan Southern): 4-6-0 built by Brooks in 1891; eventually scrapped.

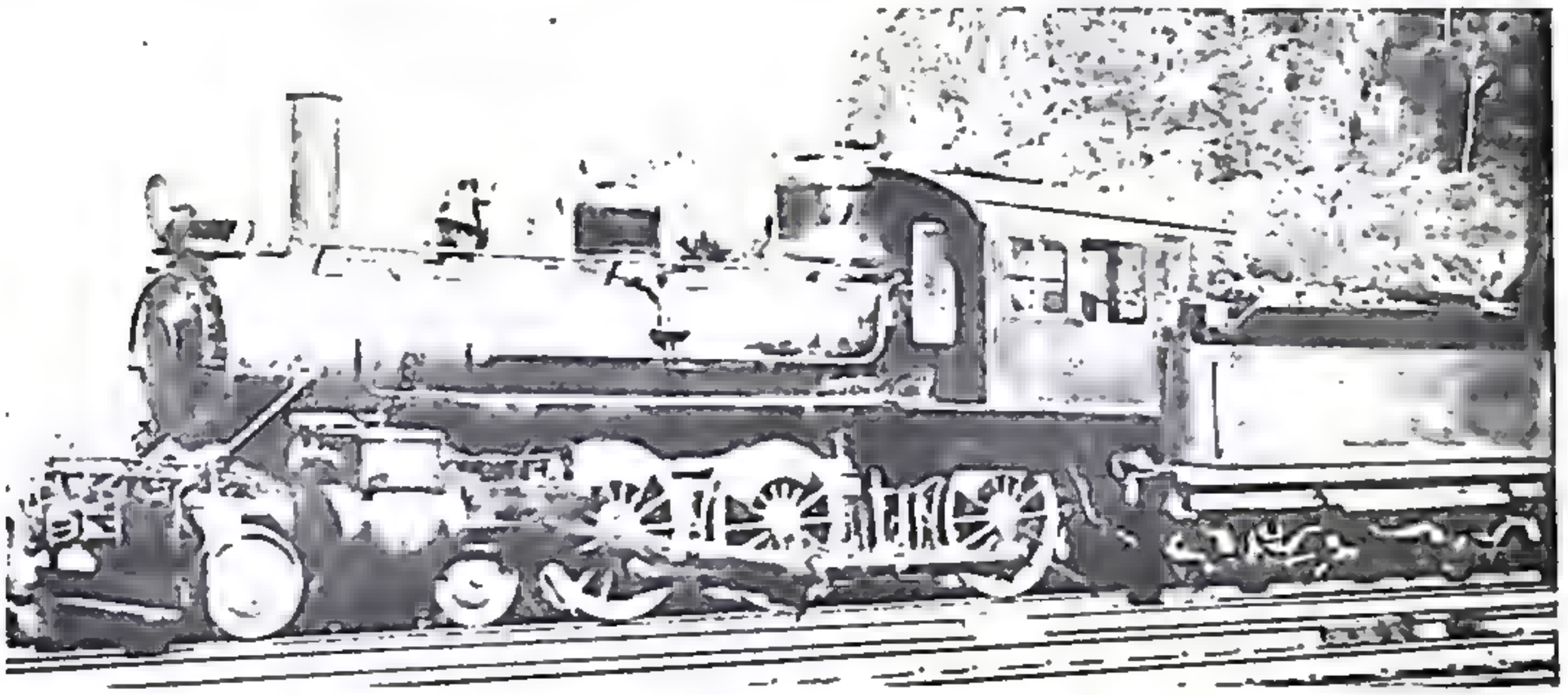
No. 21. (ex-LS&MS): 4-6-0 built by Brooks in 1892; eventually scrapped.

No. 39. (ex-Boston & Albany): 2-8-0 built by Rhode Island in 1891; eventually scrapped.

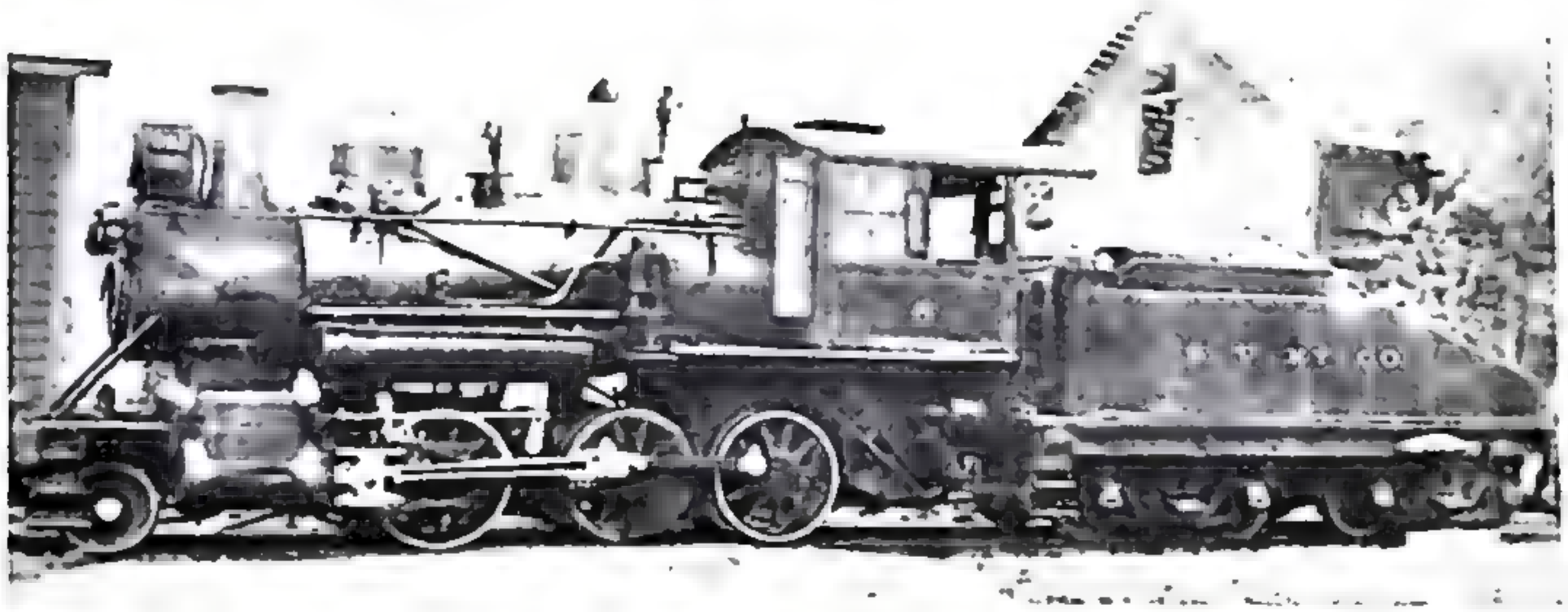
No. 5. (ex-Washington, Brandywine & Pt. Lookout): 2-6-0 built by Baldwin in 1924; eventually scrapped.

No. 6. (ex-Keesville, Ausable Chasm & Lake Champlain): 2-6-0 built by ALCO in 1913; scrapped in 1949.





STANDARD-GAUGE NOS. 14 & 21 (ABOVE); 39 & 6 (BELOW)



the grade was so steep and the strain on the drawbars so great, the car couplings were reinforced with heavy chains during the perilous descent down the cliff.

The crews of the railroad performed the tricky crossing successfully several times, until one day someone hooked a chain loosely instead of

NARROW-GAUGE WORKHORSE DRAWS LOGS FROM SOMERSET INTO MOUNTAIN MILLS (NOTE TWIN-GAUGE TRACK)

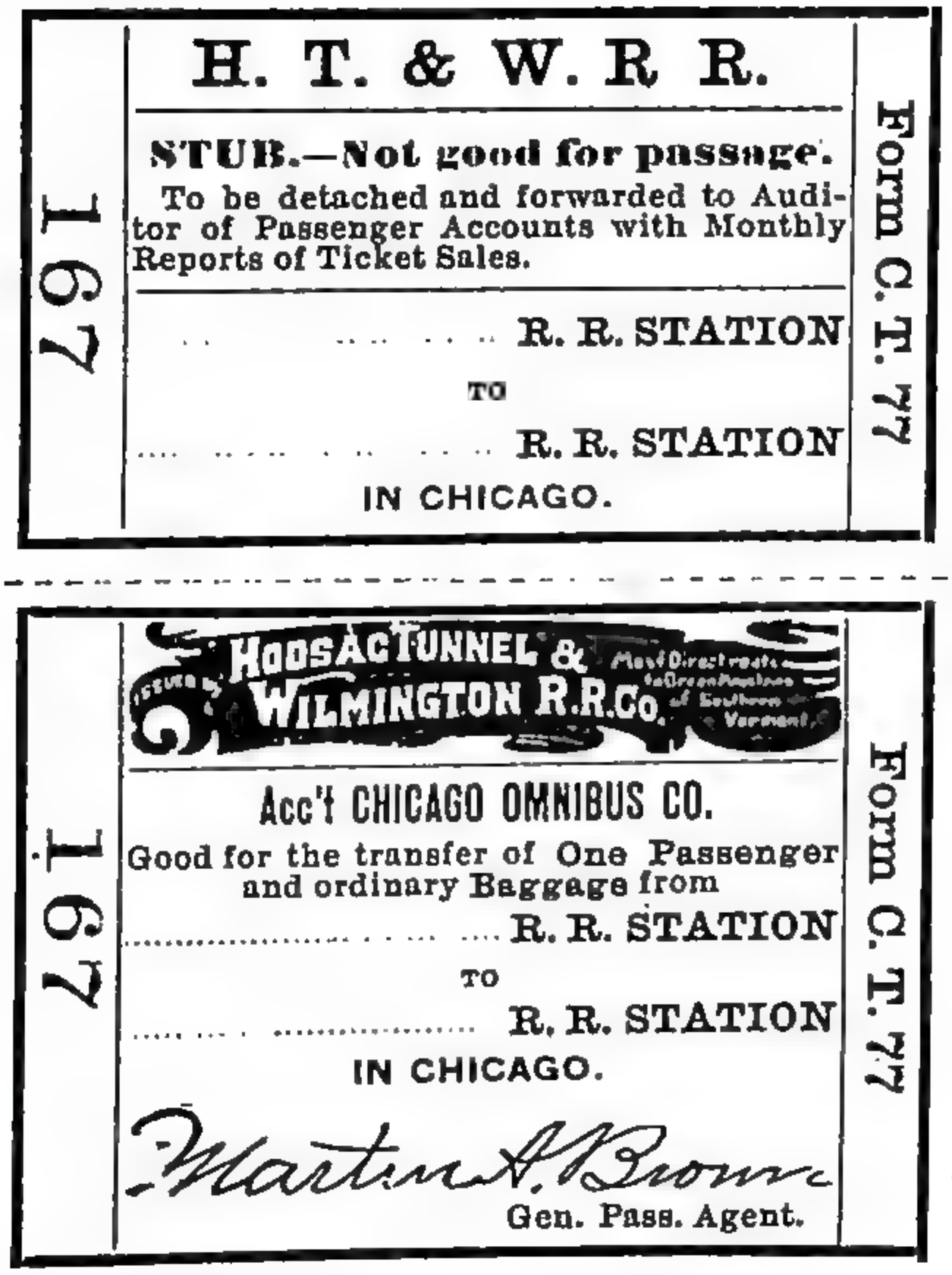
snugly. As luck would have it, that coupling was the one to snap. The weight of two loaded cars hit the end of the slack chain, snapping it like so much twine; the cars picked up speed so rapidly that young Kingsley, on the lead car, had no chance to jump. The runaways thundered down the slope, negotiated the curve and the trestle intact, and rolled up the bank toward the walls of the plant. Kingsley, atop the car, sensed that the cars were losing momentum and, with the insouciance of the man who rides several tons of uncontrollable freight car every day, he spun the useless brake wheel in a masterful display of pure fake, straining to apply the nonfunctioning brakes. The cars rolled gently to a stop right beside the plant walls, while the construction men gazed in awe at the brave railroader. Officials of the power company were so impressed that they later presented Kingsley with a box of cigars as token of their admiration —cigars which smoked sweetly indeed for the chortling men of the HT&W.

Any mountain railroad has its runaways, of course, and some of those on the HT&W were wild. Perhaps the most rambunctious was a carload

of waste paper destined for the Monroe papermill one day in 1915. As was the custom, the engineer pulled beyond the siding and, after the switch had been closed, bumped the car loose for a flying switch. But the heavy load gave the car too much speed too quickly. The car leaped the switch, and its brakeman, making a quick mental review of the precipitous

HT&W'S NO. 2 LOADS EXCURSIONISTS AT READSBORO

grades below Monroe Bridge, showed that he was the man for swift, decisive action. He jumped. Almost before he hit the ground the car vanished around a curve, headed for Hoosac Tunnel. The engineer, also thinking quickly, shunted his other cars onto the siding, pulled off, signaled for an open switch and, opening the throttle as much as he dared, backed away in pursuit of the car.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HOW TO GET ACROSS CHICAGO COURTESY OF THE HT&W (TICKET REPRODUCED HERE ACTUAL SIZE)

"Every curve I rounded," he recalled later, "I expected to find that car, but I never did."

By some miracle—and the railroad men regarded it as a bona fide, certified marvel—the car held the tracks, whipping around every curve. Its pursuers found it standing in the yard at Hoosac Tunnel, its journal boxes smoking and its running gear somewhat the worse for wear but, all things considered, in remarkably good condition.

POWER PROJECTS provided business for the HT&W, but their impact on the little railroad did not end there. Among other things, they provided the railroad with a new owner, for the New England Power Company purchased the line in January 1922. Included in the sale was much of the land that formerly constituted the Newton empire in the valley.

Work started later that same year on the biggest of the installations in the great Deerfield power complex, the Harriman Dam. Named for Henry I. Harriman, the power company's chief engineer, the dam was located at a narrow neck of the valley about two miles above Readsboro, within

READSBORO: OLD MACHINE SHOP (ABOVE); NEW ENGINEHOUSE

a stone's throw of the HT&W's Whitingham Station at Davis Bridge. The world's highest earth dam at the time of its construction, the Harriman Dam towered 200 feet high and was nearly a quarter of a mile thick at its base. The Harriman power station was located on the Deerfield about a mile below Readsboro. Water traveled from the dam to the station through an underground conduit. The dam's spillway was a great concrete opening located level with the top of the dam, the famous "glory hole." The water started its trip with a dive down the glory hole to the base of the dam.

To allow for the waters expected to rise behind the new dam, the tracks were moved higher up on the side of the ravine, a short distance to the east of the old roadbed. The relocation created a new grade that was a killer, even by the relatively liberal standards of the HT&W. It rose 180 feet vertically in little more than half a mile, well beyond the theoretical limits of practicality. The trains could pull the grade only by making a rattling run at top speed from Readsboro, hurtling up the dam, over a temporary trestle across one corner of the lake, and into the station at Davis Bridge.

The ride was not recommended for hypersensitive travelers. A former engineer recalls one time he went over the hump with a two-car passenger train, which was flagged to a stop just south of Davis Bridge. While awaiting the flagman's signal to go ahead, the engineer heard a piercing scream from the passenger cars. Trainmen rushed back and found a female prostrate in one of the cars. A friend explained that the woman, wanting some air, had raised a window and leaned out. "That was all right," the railroader said later. "Her mistake was looking down. She was parked right over the glory hole, and when she looked down there wasn't anything for 180 feet, straight down."

Meanwhile, and apparently from the moment of purchase, the power company had been looking ahead to the time when the proposed reservoir would be full, and only by a major relocation of the line west of the big lake could the HT&W continue to operate north of the dam. After a study of the railroad's business returns, the power company announced that 75 percent of the line's revenue came from Readsboro and points south, and that continued operation north to Wilmington would soon result in regular deficits—even without the cost of relocation, estimated at $250,000.

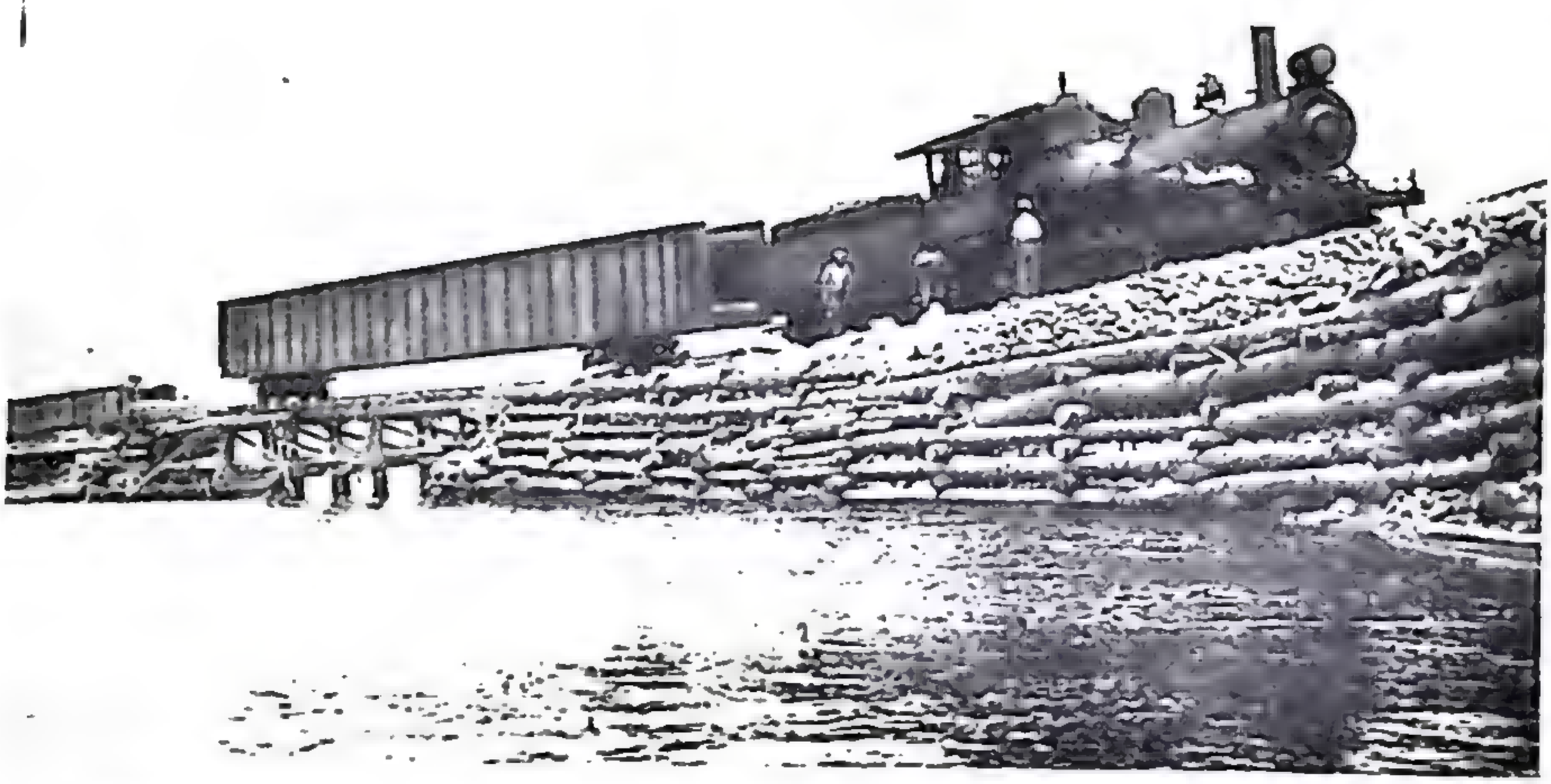
The pro-railroad group, comprising most of the residents in the northern half of the valley, promptly shot back with figures which showed that although the Wilmington-Mountain Mills contribution to the gross income had fallen from around 55 percent of the total in both 1919 and 1920, it still accounted for a healthy 38 percent in 1921.

Faced with this evidence that the railroad's adherents would go down with all statistics flying, the power company beat a retreat. No more was heard of outright abandonment. Instead the company proposed an alternate plan which contained curious echoes of the long-forgotten scheme to make Whitingham the chief seaport of southern Vermont. This time, however, Wilmington would be the port. In brief, the company proposed to discontinue railroad service north of Davis Bridge, to pay the town of Wilmington $100,000 outright, and, as soon as the Harriman Reservoir had enough water in it, to establish a ferry across the lake during the summer months, carrying freight cars to Wilmington on big barges.

TRACK HUGS THE RIVER NORTH OF MONROE BRIDGE

The issue was joined at a special town meeting August 14, 1922. Henry Harriman, representing the power company, was reasonable and persuasive, and his presentation lingered on the subject of the $100,000 and all the things the town could do with it. Spokesmen for the opposition promptly pointed out that winter service would not exist—what with the icing-over of the lake and deep snows in the valley—and that the boat scheme would be something less than perfect in the summer too, for the varying level of the water would, on occasion, put the head of navigation far out in the mud flats.

Amid the general outcry against the plan, however, one prophet raised his voice. He was a Wilmington farmer, who allowed that his fellow townspeople were fools not to grab the $100,000 while the opportunity offered. Better roads and better automotive transportation would soon make the town less dependent of the railroad, he argued; and anyway, the attitude of the company clearly pointed to eventual abandonment of the tracks, with or without relocation. And when that happened the town would have neither railroad nor $100,000.



SECOND TRESTLE AT MOUNTAIN MILLS, STEEL GIRDERS ACROSS GAP

But prophets must be without honor. When the motion came to a vote, the power company's offer was greeted with a thunderous "No!"

For Wilmington, it was all or nothing.

The power company did relocate along the west bank of the rising reservoir. A dizzying, Z-shaped switchback was created at the base of Harriman Dam to enable the trains to reach the top of the dam, which

was used as a 1,200-foot bridge to get the tracks to the other side. Opposite Mountain Mills, trains used a simpler switchback, reversed across a new concrete-and-log trestle a quarter of a mile long, and picked up the original route into Wilmington.

For a time, all went well. The power company took an apparently genuine interest in the railroad—an interest no doubt stimulated by the happy discovery that the road had substantial cash reserves. Although the railroad had not paid a dividend since 1911, a very healthy $10 dividend was declared for 1922. Just to prove it was no fluke, that little windfall was followed a year later by a staggering $75 dividend. That just about dried up the cow. In 1924 the company scraped together enough for another $5, the last dividend ever paid on HT&W stock.

Still, the company did invest in some new equipment. In the spring of 1923 the railroad bought an unusual gasoline-powered tractor-trailer rig, widely hailed as the salvation of short lines everywhere. Built by the 4-Wheel Drive Auto Company of Clintonville, Wisconsin, the train was powered by a 95 h.p., 6-cylinder T-head engine. The makers claimed

A BAD BUY, THIS GASOLINE RIG WAS AROUND FOR 10 YEARS

the machine would make 45 miles an hour and travel five miles on a gallon of gas; with its double-spring system eliminating the standard railroad trucks, the entire rig weighed only 21,000 pounds—one fifth of a locomotive's weight.

Because the HT&W was the first road to try the gasoline car, its maiden run on May 22 received wide publicity, with arrangements made for a steam

locomotive to pull a flatcar ahead of the gas train so newspaper and newsreel photographers from Boston and Springfield could record the historic trip. In use, however, the gasoline doodlebug proved to be something less than a hit. It had many drawbacks. For one thing, track maintenance was not a strong point of the HT&W during the '20s, and the light gas car gave a bone-rattling ride. For another, the tractor was occasionally pressed into emergency service as a freight or switch locomotive, which had a deleterious effect on its delicate bearings. Eventually the rig deteriorated to the point where it was good for only a few trips between visits to the shop. In 1933 it was unloaded on James G. Ashley, the amateur railroad tycoon who had bought the moribund West River Railroad running out of Brattleboro. It succumbed to fire a year later.

If the HT&W flopped with the gas buggy, it performed magnificently on another experiment conducted in 1926. It all started when the superintendent of the power station at Readsboro noticed that his crewmen showed a curious preference for the delights of Monroe Bridge during their off-duty hours. None of the valley villages was exactly a hot-spot, but Monroe Bridge, the smallest of the lot, also appeared to the naked eye to be the deadest. Although the entire land languished in the allegedly bone-dry grip of the Eighteenth Amendment, the superintendent began to suspect that old devil booze. He communicated his suspicions to the Massachusetts State Police, whose agents soon reported that there was more than paper pulp cooking in Monroe Bridge, and plans were made for a raid.

Early on the morning of March 24, 1926, a special train of the HT&W coasted into Monroe Bridge, its running lights doused and its whistle silent. The train eased to a stop, disgorging a force of twenty-five state policemen, federal agents, and deputy sheriffs. They fanned out through the deserted lanes of the village and, at a pre-arranged time, pounded on the doors of selected houses, bursting in as soon as the sleepy occupants appeared to accept the search warrants.

The first and apparently the only Volstead Special in the history of Prohibition was an unqualified success: on the return trip to Hoosac Tunnel, where another train waited to carry the haul to the county lockup in Greenfield, the manifest included two complete stills, five barrels of wine, six barrels of moonshine whisky mash, three barrels of wine mash, 700 bottles of beer, a miscellaneous collection of bottles, funnels, strainers and other incriminating equipment, and eight recently retired bootleggers.

Having done its bit for virtue, the power company resolved to get out of the railroad business. By now it was apparent to the company, if not to all residents of the valley, that the rising waters of Harriman Lake would soon put an end to the operations at Mountain Mills. But when the blow fell the company was largely rid of its railroad holdings, for on December

18, 1926, the company sold 80 percent of the railroad's stock to a combine of valley merchants headed by A. B. Clark of the Readsboro Chair Company, who became president of the road. For the first time in its history, valley folk held control of their railroad. Or perhaps they only held the bag.

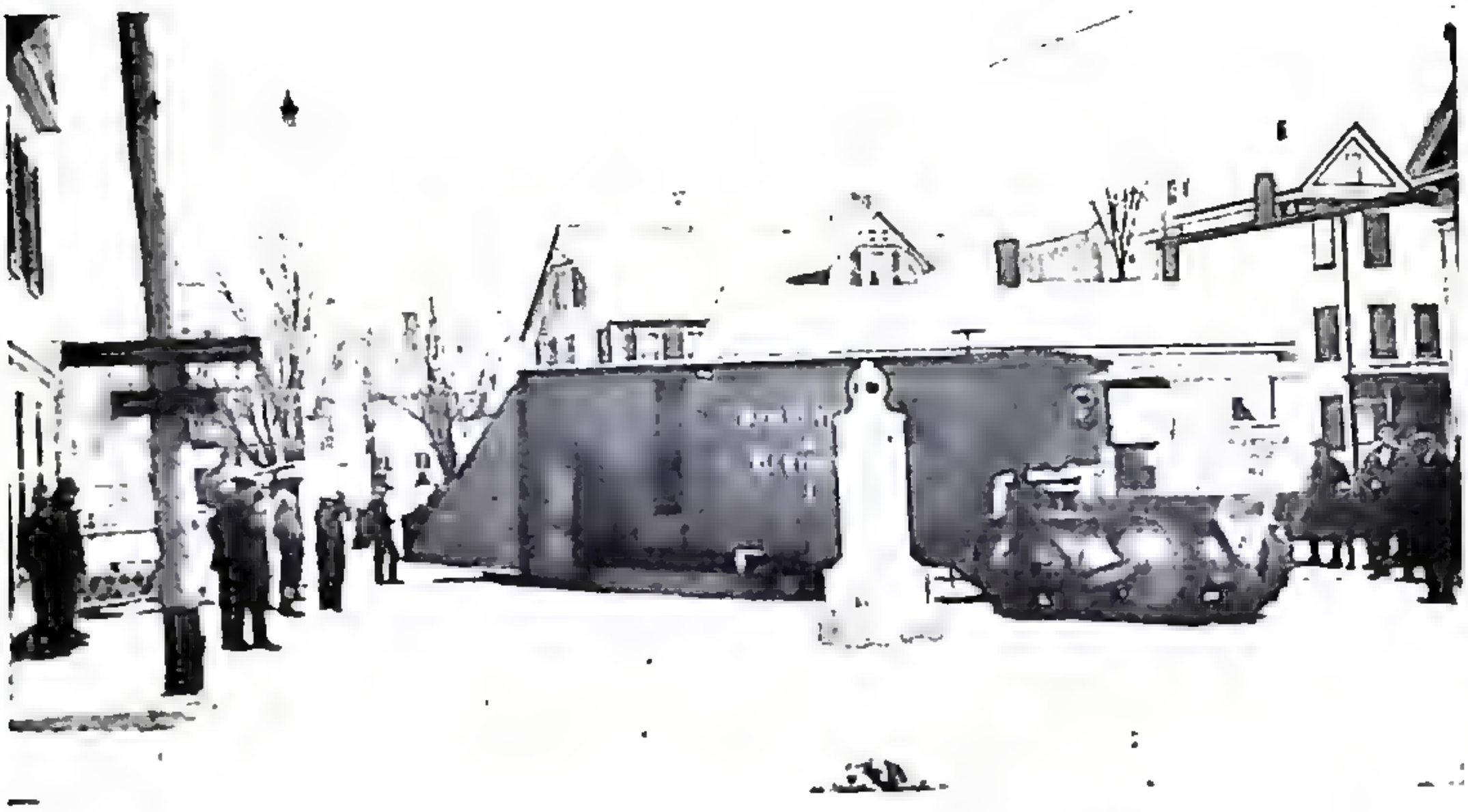
Within a year the new owners received their first painful lesson in the perils of owning a railroad. On November 3, 1927, a disastrous flood struck New England. Railroads suffered with the rest, and the HT&W received two heavy blows. Near Monroe Bridge an avalanche of mud, trees, rocks and water poured down the mountainside, wiping out several hundred feet of track. Bad as was the damage there, however, it was easily reparable; not so the trestle at Mountain Mills, because the trestle wasn't there any more.

The dazed owners of the railroad set about repairing the damage. First they suspended passenger service on the entire line, substituting a motorized "stage" along the River Road from Wilmington to Hoosac Tunnel. The bus line was so successful that it was continued after rail service was restored, and henceforth the "rail" passengers rode on rubber tires. Those who made the trip on November 2 hadn't known it at the time, but they were the last riders of a regularly scheduled HT&W passenger train.

But passenger service was only a small part of the problem; something had to be done about rebuilding the shattered track and trestle, and the railroad, thoroughly milked by those big dividends a few years earlier, had no money. Wilmington encouraged the owners to think positive by voting an outright grant of $3,900 at its 1928 town meeting. The railroad responded by floating a 20-year, $75,000 bond issue to pay for repairs, $30,000 of it for a new trestle. A group from the newly organized Chamber of Commerce alone sold $16,000 worth of the bonds outside the area.

The new trestle was pretty shaky, but it caused no real trouble until the winter of 1935-36. Heavy snows plagued the line until, by February, drifts ten feet deep blocked the track between Wilmington and Readsboro, and the snow cover on the slopes was even deeper. It was a situation made for trouble. On March 18 trouble came—a steady, warm rain that ate away the winter's snow accumulation in a matter of hours, pouring the runoff into the Deerfield. About 11 a.m. that morning the Mountain Mills trestle collapsed under the pounding of the swollen river.

THE 1936 FLOOD administered the *coup de grâce* to local ownership of the HT&W. The railroad went on the block again and later that year was acquired by thirty-eight-year-old Samuel M. Pinsly of Boston. Pinsly



HT&W SNOWPLOW USES WILMINGTON'S MAIN STREET
FOR TURNTABLE AFTER '36 FLOOD

funds on the proposition that the HT&W could become a paying venture, that it could even pay off its $201,000 in outstanding debts. Though he had never run a railroad before, he intended to operate this one on a professional, profit-making basis.

First off, Pinsly petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission for permission to abandon the line north of Readsboro. As soon as permission to abandon came through, the rails were ripped up and sold for scrap. The money went back into the railroad. In the fall of 1937, some 5,000 new ties were placed on the remaining 11 miles. Early in 1938 the railroad acquired No. 5, its first 20th-century engine, a fourteen-year-old, 44-ton Mogul locomotive bought from the Washington, Brandywine & Point Lookout Railroad. Old No. 39, built in 1891 and since 1918 the mainstay of the railroad, went to the scrap heap.

Then came fresh disaster. On September 21, 1938, a hurricane swept over New England, spreading flood and destruction. The Deerfield Valley was hit with the rest. The river rose so swiftly that the power company, fearing that even the mighty Harriman Dam might not hold, cut the flashboards on the spillway, adding some of the impounded water of the reservoir to the already heavy burden of the river. As the flood roared past Monroe Bridge it snatched a tank car from the siding at the Deerfield Glassine Company, smashing it to pieces on the rocky riverbed. But that wasn't the worst of the damage. In the 11 miles between Readsboro and Hoosac Tunnel, the tracks were disrupted in 103 places

by washouts and avalanches—undoubtedly the highest ratio of damage to track length among all the New England railroads devastated by the hurricane.

That the little railroad was already deeply in debt was hardly a secret. The $75,000 bond issue, floated after the 1927 flood, was still outstanding, and the railroad owed more than $100,000 on "interlines," charges for shipments over connecting roads. To many it seemed that the HT&W must be near the end of the line. On September 30, eight days after the flood subsided, the stockholders met to consider the fate of the railroad. Defying the Jeremiahs, they decided to rebuild the shattered tracks.

Once the decision had been made, Pinsly and his crews moved swiftly. Although heavy construction equipment was a scarce commodity in the wake of the hurricane, Pinsly scratched up three power shovels somewhere. The landslides were simply shoved into the river, rough grades reestablished, the longer breaks bridged with temporary trestles. In exactly four weeks and three days the HT&W was back in business.

The new management's performance in the hurricane crisis undoubtedly won new respect from the valley residents, who recalled how long it had taken to repair the damage from the 1927 flood. And no good Vermonter could fail to appreciate Pinsly's larger achievement: in 1941, for the first time in fifteen years, the HT&W showed a profit.

One factor in the renewed financial health of the road was a revival of an ancient specialty, the excursion train. As the short lines of New England were gradually consolidated into large systems—the B&M, the Boston & Albany (itself a part of the still larger New York Central), the New Haven—the few remaining old-style local railroads, such as the HT&W, became an object of growing interest to railroad fans. The larger lines constantly modernized their equipment, peddling their antiquated locomotives and other rolling stock to the marginal railroads, and while the general public might go for the glamor of crack streamliners, the fans preferred the old one-lung woodburners toiling on the backwoods short lines. That much of the HT&W 's equipment was, to put it charitably, well along in years, helped to stimulate interest in the special trips arranged during the 1930s by the New England Division of the National Association of Railroad Enthusiasts, Inc., headquartered in Boston.

The first of these excursions occurred on August 24, 1934, when 48 Enthusiasts took a special B&M car from Boston to Hoosac Tunnel. There they were met by No. 21, built in 1892 for the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern, bought by the HT&W in 1922. Hooked on behind No. 21 were a wooden coach borrowed from the B&M and a freight caboose, newly painted bright red, to serve as an observation car.

The excursionists, the first passengers to ride the rails of the HT&W since the 1927 flood, had a leisurely trip north to Wilmington, stopping several times so the photographers in the group could snap pictures of old locomotives rusting on the scrap heap—among them the boiler of old *Readsboro No. 1,* still standing on its siding at the site of the old Whitingham Station. After lunch in Readsboro, the group continued on to Wilmington; then back to Hoosac Tunnel non-stop, where the B&M met the special with a car to carry the Enthusiasts back to Boston.

All hands agreed that the excursion had been a great success, and another was announced for October 7, timed to take advantage of the splendid display of fall foliage in the Deerfield gorge. This trip drew 65 passengers, including many repeaters, and all of them got something more than they had bargained for—a genuine, first-class derailment.

Except for one stop to chase cows off the track—always a hazard on the HT&W—all went smoothly on the trip. But on the twilight run back to Hoosac Tunnel, as the special neared Harriman Dam, the rear truck of the tender, the front truck of the coach, and both trucks of the caboose left the track on the lake side of the embankment. Several excursionists were atop the caboose at the time, but they threw themselves flat at the first jolt and managed to hang on until the train bumped to a stop. Fortunately, the train had been doing only about 10 miles an hour, so the cars remained upright.

The crew, accustomed to making do in such minor mishaps without the aid of heavy equipment, set to work, using the locomotive as their power source. A. A. McCarthy, B&M trainmaster and one of the excursionists, was dispatched to Hoosac Tunnel to hold the eastbound train which was to carry the fans back to Boston. Seven of the Enthusiasts, apparently for the merry old hell of it, set off to hike the seven miles to Readsboro. At the scene of the derailment the train crew faced an unexpected hazard—a surplus of advice and assistance. "The fans got out and bothered the daylights out of us," Phil Barre, the train's engineer, said some years later. "They had read up on how to get a train back on the track, and they knew everything that had to be done."

The pleasure the rail fans took in the derailment was typical of the delight they took in all the amusements provided by the HT&W. In a curious sort of a way, these excursions are a handy symbol of the turnabout that had overtaken the valley and its railroad. Forty years before, the railroad had been the last word in modernity, enabling residents of a few isolated Vermont villages to escape, however briefly, from a life and a society that had changed in few essentials since the days of their grandfathers. The excursionists of the 1930s, with a nostalgia focused specifically on railroading, sought something quite different from the goal

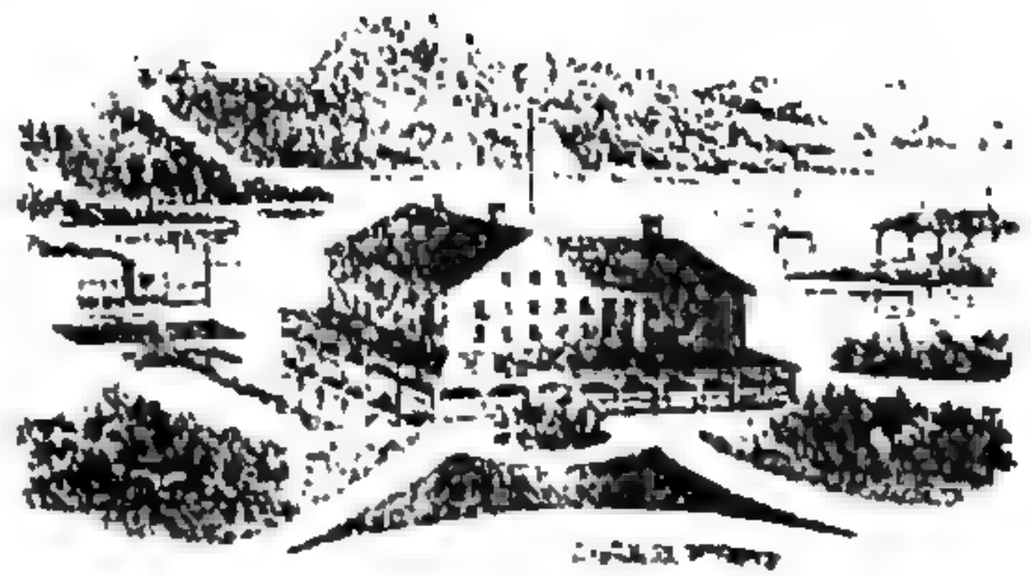
SOMERSET
WARDSBORO
SEARSBURG
WEST DOVER

HAYSTACK MT.
LAKE RAPONDA HOTEL
WILMINGTON
MOUNTAIN MILLS
JACKSONVILLE
BRATTLEBORO
WHITINGHAM
READSBORO
SHERMANS
MONROE BRIDGE
HEYWOODS
LOBANS
HOOSAC TUNNEL
SO VERNON
MILLERS FALLS
GREENFIELD
BALLYINSVILLE
ASHBURNHAM
FITCHBURG
AYER JC
ATHOL
GARDNER
SHELBURNE FALLS
SO. DEERFIELD
WILLIAMSBURG
AMHERST
NORTHAMPTON
EASTHAMPTON
HOLYOKE
WESTFIELD
MONTOH
BONDSVILLE
PALMER
SPRINGFIELD
WORCESTER
OAKDALE
BARRE
PITTSFIELD
HOUSATONIC
HUDSON
CATSKILL
KINGSTON
POUGHKEEPSIE
HARTFORD
NEW HAVEN
N.Y. N.H. & H.R.R.
NORWICH
NEW LONDON
SAYBROOK
PROVIDENCE
BOSTON
CONCORD
MANCHESTER
HANCOCK JC
KEENE
NASHUA
WINDHAM
MERRIMAC
BRADFORD
LAWRENCE
ROCKPORT
GLOUCESTER
LOWELL
N ACTON
CONCORD JC
SALEM
SARATOGA SPRINGS
GREENWICH
BALLSTON
MECHANICVILLE
NO BENNINGTON
BENNINGTON
TROY
WILLIAMSTOWN
NO ADAMS
SCHENECTADY
ALBANY
NEW YORK
WHITE PLAINS
BRIDGEPORT
N.Y.N.H. & H.R.R.

DISTANCES

WILMINGTON
HOOSAC TUNNEL 23 MILES
SPRINGFIELD 81 MILES
TROY 81 MILES
SARATOGA 83 MILES
HARTFORD 119 MILES
NEW HAVEN 152 MILES
WORCESTER 146 MILES
NEW YORK 230 MILES
PROVIDENCE 190 MILES
BOSTON 183 MILES
PHILADELPHIA 356 MILES
BALTIMORE 419 MILES
WASHINGTON 470 MILES

TAKE THE HOOSAC TUNNEL AND WILMINGTON RAILROAD, SHORTEST AND MOST DIRECT ROUTE TO THE GREEN MOUNTAINS OF SOUTHERN VERMONT.



LAKE RAPONDA HOTEL

of the earlier excursionists, indeed the very reverse of it. In the HT&W and the semi-rural villages it served, they found, if not the life of their grandathers, then certainly that of their fathers; they sampled the delights not of sophistication, but of simplicity. Even after the railroad acquired No. 5, its first modern locomotive, the fans would have none of it; old No. 21, the big ten-wheeler, vintage '92, was the one they wanted, just as they preferred the rattling, uncomfortable wooden cars of the same era which the HT&W borrowed from the B&M for its excursions. And as word of the peculiar pleasures of retreat from modernity spread, the excursions became increasingly popular. In all, the Boston Enthusiasts sponsored seven such trips, the last of them, on July 27, 1941, drawing more than 600 passengers.

World War II put an end to excursions for a while, but otherwise it had relatively little effect on the railroad. Though freight business was not much better than it had been, the railroad continued to make money—so much so that Pinsly was able to buy a second railroad, the 30-mile Saratoga & Schuylerville, in New York, in 1945. All told he now owns or has owned a half-dozen railroads, the longest of them only 50 miles long. Among his railroads is the 14-mile Montpelier & Barre, Vermont's only other surviving independent short line.

It is often assumed that a man who collects short-line railroads has to be an incurable sentimentalist, a soulmate of the people who buy ramshackle country inns in moribund Vermont villages. In Pinsly's case,

B&M TRAIN ON FITCHBURG LINE WHISTLES OUT OF TUNNEL
THAT GAVE HT&W ITS NAME

the picture could hardly be more erroneous. He runs his little empire from a walnut-paneled executive suite on the 11th floor of 150 Causeway Street, Boston, next door to North Station, in the same building that houses the headquarters of the mighty (but unprofitable) Boston & Maine. His railroads are businesses, first and last, and his control is very nearly absolute: of the 2,500 shares of HT&W stock, Pinsly owns 1,884 2/3 shares, the rest being scattered among the other sixteen shareholders.

Under his tight management the HT&W has produced consistent profits. In the later years of World War II, the net income after taxes ran around $5,000 to $6,000 a year. But in 1947 they climbed to $10,312, and in 1950 to $11,828. More importantly, Pinsly steadily whittled away the railroad's debts: in 1944, the net assets of the road were minus $38,287, but in 1945 they crossed the divide to plus $15,180, and with one minor exception the net-assets listing has remained in the black ever since. The 1927 bond issue fell due in 1948, but Pinsly, already planning the next big improvement on the road, obtained a fifteen-year extension. As it turned out, ten years would have been enough, for the last $27,500 installment on the bonds was paid in 1958 and the issue was retired.

Amid the wails of sentimentalists, the line changed over to diesel power in July 1949. Operating costs of diesel engines were only a fraction of steam locomotive costs; they required a smaller crew, less maintenance, cheaper fuel, and could be shut down when not in actual use. And there was an added bonus: on some of the steeper grades along the HT&W, the steamers had to hit the bottom flying in order to creep over the top, while the diesels could creep up steadily, even as slowly as 2 to 3 miles an hour—less exciting, perhaps, but far safer.

The remaining steam engines were scrapped, including old No. 21, probably the last of its vintage in regular service on any railroad in the country. Pinsly originally intended to keep No. 6, the last of the steamers to be acquired, for standby use. But a few months after the diesels arrived, the old steam engine was fired up after a long period of idleness; rust had turned her boiler into a sieve, and the locomotive spouted water and steam in every direction. She was scrapped forthwith, the last to go.

It was well that the line acquired diesels when it did, for lean years were ahead. Net income reached a peak of $11,828 in 1950, and then slid—to $8,114 in 1951, $4,277 in 1952. In 1953 the railroad's net income dropped into the red again, and for four years running the most drastic economies failed to produce a profit. The HT&W had been an anachronism for decades, and it seemed that the little railroad's hour had come at last.

The Hoosac Tunnel, completed in 1873, had been one of the great technological achievements of the 19th century—the testing ground for nitroglycerine explosives, compressed-air drills, and many other devices

and techniques of the construction business. Quite coincidentally, it had made the building of the HT&W possible. Now technology came to the rescue again. The New England Electric system needed a site for a new kind of power plant to be built by its subsidiary, the Yankee Atomic Electric Company. The power company was, of course, no stranger to the Deerfield Valley, and its surveys soon focused on the one wide spot in the lower valley, a flat near Sherman Dam, hard by the HT&W tracks. In 1955 it became official: the 50-million-dollar plant would be built on that site.

To the HT&W it meant a new lease on life. During the lean years of the early 1950s, the railroad's track and roadbed had deteriorated considerably, which was no great problem for a railroad hauling only about 45,000 tons of freight a year, most of it in small lots. But to carry the heavy materials needed for the new power plant the road would have to be in first-class condition, and the stretch from Hoosac Tunnel to the plant site was entirely rebuilt with 85-pound rails, at a cost of $160,000.

Shipments of materials for the plant began in 1958 and continued until the huge power complex, topped by a great steel globe 125 feet in diameter, was finished in 1960. Among the items hauled by rail were the reactor vessel, which weighed 175 tons and traveled on a special car, and a turbine and generator weighing 150 tons. And in the most complete sense the little railroad became an integral part of the Yankee plant: a spur line was built into the plant, right under the reactor, to carry away atomic wastes.

The new business showed in the balance sheet. The railroad crossed

into the black again, and in 1958 it registered its highest postwar income, $13,047. Things haven't been quite that good since, but at least the operating deficits have disappeared. It probably didn't hurt that passenger service disappeared during the same period, though not through the agency of the HT&W. The stage line from Wilmington had plugged along with its panel truck, carrying about a thousand passengers a year to the B&M depot at Hoosac Tunnel; but in 1958 the B&M abruptly ended passenger service on its Fitchburg line, and after three quarters of a century the HT&W was forced out of the passenger business.

What is the future of the HT&W? Pinsly discussed the question in the fall of 1962: "As long as the railroad holds its own, we'll keep it going. The people in the valley need the railroad, and we don't want to kill it if we don't have to. But as soon as it starts to lose money regularly, there'll be no more railroad."

From the standpoint of history, it undoubtedly is true that the railroad was once essential to the survival of the Deerfield Valley's economy. Whether it is so today is a matter of question. Readsboro, which kept the railroad and put its bets on small industry, is, to put it kindly, a bit down at heel today. Wilmington, which lost both railroad and industry but gained a first-class road connection in the Molly Stark Trail (Vermont Route 9), turned to winter-sports tourism as a mainstay of its economy. Once the snow on Mount Pisgah was used to skid logs down to Wilmington; now the mountain has on its east slopes the Mount Snow Ski Area, and cash customers come sliding down it on skis.

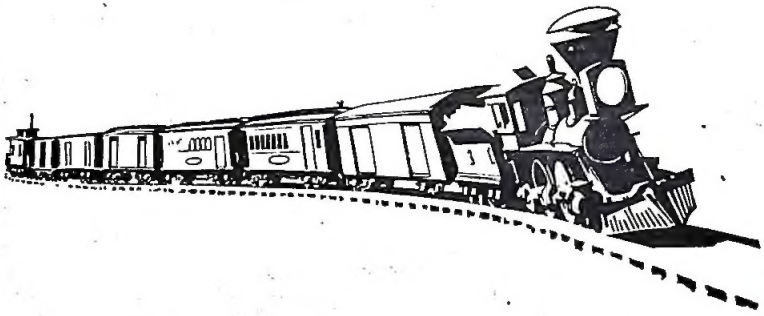
In the nature of things, the HT&W undoubtedly will vanish—if not soon, then certainly later. When it does go, its admirers at least will have the consolation of knowing that it is not unsung. Though the bleat of the diesel long ago replaced the hoot-toot of the steam whistle, and though the pastoral idyll of the Deerfield Valley was never quite what the sentimentalists claimed, the legions of fans will prefer to remember the railroad and its region as E. A. Fitch of Wilmington saw them in 1892:

Did we ever hear a music
  Sweeter than the one that thrills
As it floats along the Deerfield
  As it echoes o'er the hills.
How we watch that little engine
  As it stalks across the plain;
Was there ever music sweeter,
Was there ever sight completer
  Than the coming of the train?

Hol Ye sturdy care-worn farmers,
Ye who toil the long day through
In your quiet fields and meadows,
Patient as your hearts are true,
Tell me as ye pause and listen
As ye sow and reap the grain,
Heard ye ever music sweeter;
Saw ye ever sight completer
Than the coming of the train?

And ye aged ones and weary,
Lured by hopes and vexed by fears;
How ye strove and how ye waited
Through the long uncertain years;
And ye stricken, ye dispairing,
Tossing on your beds of pain,
Could there be music sweeter,
Could there be a sight completer
Than the coming of the train?

E'en the children, blithe and winsome,
Eager at their books and play,
Do they e'er forget it coming
Even for a single day?
Tell me lad and tell me lassie,
Blue-eyed maid and stripling saucy
While I question you again,
Was there ever music sweeter,
Was there ever sight completer,
Ever anything that's neater
And perhaps I should say fleeter,
Than the coming of the train?



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